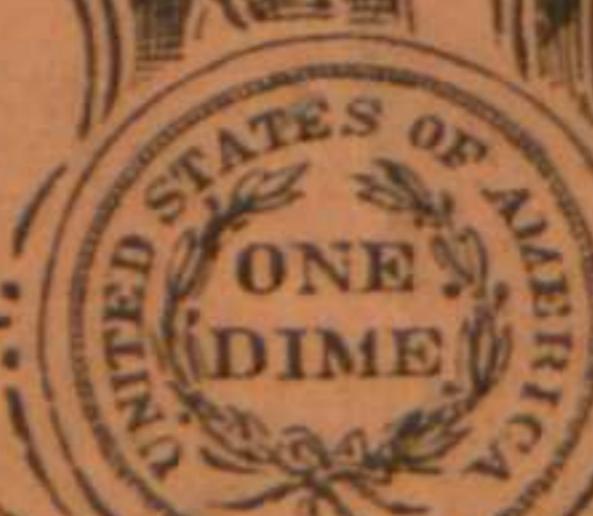


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THE MAD HUNTER.

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States for the Southern District of New York.



THE MAD HUNTER;

OR, THE

DOWNFALL OF THE LE-FORESTS.

BY MRS. M. A. DENISON,

AUTHOR OF "TIM BUMBLE'S CHARGE," "RUTH MARGERIE," ETC

BEADLE AND COMPANY,
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THE MAD HUNTER.

CHAPTER I.

WHO WILL BE THE BELLE?

"I WONDER if I shall be the belle of the ball?" and May Rogerly, letting her hands fall on her lap, began to dream. She did not see the stretch of field and wood outside, nor the blue hills that bounded them, although it seemed as if she saw nothing else. It was a pleasant place to dream in, that wide, sunny sitting-room. All things took tints of beauty, seen from the deep bay window, whose only curtains were rare vines and blood-red flowers, hanging in light and graceful festoons from pane to pane.

May was scarcely more than a child—only seventeen. Not even sorrow could long tame the merry exuberance of her spirits, or change the laughing tones of her voice. She was pretty, too, undeniably pretty, and gentle and good withal. She was left motherless when only five years old, and till within the last few years had grown up in the wilds of the West. Her father having, however, accumulated a small fortune, preferred investing his money in landed property. Accordingly he brought his little family to a pretty, thrifty, western New York village, bought land, and finally built a glass manufactory, which proved a fortunate speculation, and he was considered wealthy.

Being a man of moderate tastes, however, he did not alter his mode of living, or rush into any of the extravagances of the age. He had prevailed upon a maiden aunt of May's to leave her little place in New Jersey and take charge of his household matters. His residence was a plain, square building, with no architectural elegances, four rooms on the lower floor, and four above. The only beautiful thing the house could boast of was little May Rogerly, for she continued to make herself look pretty, and kept happy the livelong day.

Their nearest neighbor, the agent for the glass-works, lived within a stone's throw. Great was the contrast which his style of living afforded to that of his richer neighbor. His house was full of points and angles, and as old Rogerly contemptuously called it, "gingerbread work" on the roof and windows. His wife, son and daughter aimed to be fashionable, though they succeeded but poorly, and the interior of the "villy," as Mrs. Le Forest called it, was as conspicuous for show and colors, as was the outside for ornament. Rose Le Forest flattered herself that she was handsome. She was a vain, black-eyed girl, whose many airs and ridiculous pretensions made sensible people laugh. Her form and features were good, but she overloaded the one with dress, and the others were lacking in the only charm that constitutes true beauty—expression. The son, whom the ambitious mother had named Raphael, but whom common folks designated as "Rafe," was as vain and fond of dress as his sister—kept a horse, wore gauntlet gloves on all occasions, and took every opportunity to impress his stylishness on the inhabitants of the town.

The father, a handsome, somewhat showy man, had, before he entered upon this business, been a money-broker, and hard stories were told of him. He, however, cared very little about what was said of him. He was generally a hard, exacting man, but loved to idolatry his two children, who were brought up to have all their wants supplied without stint, and their extravagances maintained without expostulation. Rafe was handsome in a brilliant, showy way, but his education had imparted a shade of imperiousness that was, to say the least, unpleasant, and his manner gave the impression that in his own opinion, at all events, he was irresistible. One more family deserves our passing attention. In a little, low cottage, half a mile from the residence of old Mr. Rogerly, lived a young widow and her two blue-eyed girls, twins.

Trouble had come early to this little household. At the age of nineteen, Mrs. Barclay had found herself a widow, alone in the world, without friends or relatives, with her helpless little ones to support, and with a mortgage of three hundred dollars on her home. This mortgage her husband had fully expected to lift by the close of the year, when he was taken so abruptly from his family. The expenses of his sickness and

funeral had exhausted the sum already laid up for this object, leaving his young wife with only her own energies to depend upon.

The agent for the glass-works was the holder of the mortgage. She knew that he was considered a hard man, and she worked beyond her strength, in the hope of paying him off. But her little earnings scarcely more than sufficed for her every-day expenses. By paying an exorbitant illegal interest, which amounted each year to a little rent, and never gave her a chance to save any thing, she induced the agent, from year to year, to forbear foreclosure, until, at the time our story opens, he, probably being in need of ready money, was about to sell her home from her, regardless of the fact that she had paid him more than the principal in usurious interest, and that she would be turned shelterless into the world.

Young Le Forest had done the town the flattering honor to inaugurate a ball. There had never yet been a festivity of the kind, and though Mr. Rogerly had a decided aversion for any thing of the sort, yet he had yielded to the united entreaty of Rose and her brother, and given his unwilling consent. And May, foolish, happy little thing, was in raptures. Rose, who was three years her senior, though she would not acknowledge it, was an accomplished dancer, and had taught May all the necessary steps and figures for a few plain cotillions. To the unsophisticated girl, this was the great treat of her life. To listen to music, of which she was passionately fond—to see the throng of gay people, and to dance till midnight! it occupied all of her waking and most of her sleeping thoughts. At last the day had come—the clear, bright winter day. There was not a cloud in the sky. The snow had been some time melted—only here and there a patch of glistening ice, and the pendent drops hanging from the evergreen trees, attested to the reign of the most inclement season of the year. The roses flourished within, for old Mr. Rogerly was as fond of them as his daughter, and willingly afforded the expense of warming them all the winter through.

“Aunty, I shall have some flowers for my hair, and Rose sent over this morning to see if I could give her some. I did want to make a wreath for my braid, but she will want the best of them, I know.”

"Then I advise thee, child, to cut off what thee wants and lay them aside. Thee can leave the brightest ones, as thee is light and she is dark. I would have these pretty, well-shaped flowers, and those other white ones, the everlastings."

"What, and give all these beautiful geranium blossoms to her?"

"No, child, thee can take a few and mix in, thee knows—but mercy on us, what figure is that coming this way?"

CHAPTER II.

THE MAD HUNTER.

MAY looked up and saw full cause for her aunt Hannah's exclamation. The figure approaching the house was that of a stalwart old man, apparently near upon seventy. Not that his gait was trembling, or his figure bent, but his hair was snow white, and his features bore unmistakably the marks of age. His head was surmounted by a high beaver hat, around which was tied, ending in a fantastic bow at the side, a red cotton scarf. A handkerchief of a similar color dangled from his neck, made more picturesque by the long, clinging, snowy beard, that hung below it. A pair of hunter's leggings were tied over his knees, and by strings crossed down to his boots, which were as white and wrinkled as himself by age. An old-fashioned coat, with brass buttons, and corduroy breeches, completed his attire. He leaned upon a heavy, knobby walking-stick, originally a strong young sapling, and walked with a good deal of energy for so aged a man.

"Niece, what shall we do? I am frightened to death. Thee sees the man must be crazy, and he is coming directly toward the house. I'll set the dog on him."

"Auntie," cried May, her face glowing, "you wouldn't certainly set him on a poor old man. Wait till he comes and see what he wants? You can go up stairs if you wish to. I'm not afraid." Her bright blue eyes kindled as she spoke, and her cheeks shamed the blooming roses in the window.

"Well, May, thee always had good pluck," said the timid woman, with a glance of admiration at her young niece, "and I am very foolish to feel afraid. But thee knows one of thy uncles was a lunatic, and very savage, and my courage is never very good at the best."

By this time the unique-looking stranger had come quite near, and they saw that on one side he carried a gun, strapped in some manner, so that it was not necessary for him to support it with his hand. Presently he reached the door and knocked. They kept no female domestic, and the boy Sam, who usually tended door, was out in the pine tract, some distance off, chopping wood, so May, gently pulling her aunt back, went to the door. She was astonished at the face of mild benignity that met her not wholly assured welcome.

"Good-day, young lady. 'Old Master"—here he raised his eyes reverently—"told me to come here and get something to eat. I am very hungry, but if I hadn't a bad finger here, I never would have asked for charity."

"Come in," said May, a cordial smile lighting up her sweet face.

He paused a moment in evident admiration, turned to one side to wipe away a tear that started to his eye, and entered.

"Young lady," he said, with the same stateliness of manner, which seemed all the more singular on account of his uncouth garb, "will you undo the buckle of this strap and I can put my gun down?"

She complied with ready alacrity.

"Thank you," he said, grasping the old king's arm with both hands, and lowering it to a corner of the hall; "my old Master will bless you for your kindness to a poor hunter."

May, by this time, understood his reverent allusion, that at first she had not known how to take: by his "old Master" he meant God. She could not smile at his simplicity; on the contrary, a sudden respect sprung up in her mind toward the venerable man. Hastily preparing some food, the best she had in the house, she set it before him, not forgetting a little pot of wild honey.

"Young lady," he said, after he had finished eating, "it may seem an ungrateful office to perform, but I am a lonely

man, and have lived for twenty-five years in the wilderness; consequently, I have had nothing to depend upon but my gun, and no one to keep me company but old Master, up there. He has spoken to me in the sunshine and in the storm. I have heard his voice in the tops of the trees. He has told me not to revenge my great wrong, though I had the power —a wrong that would seem to justify the spilling of red blood. But he has said: 'Vengeance is mine.' And now old Master compels me to speak out. There is a cloud lowering over this house. Don't turn pale, child, it may not burst in destroying thunder, but old Master says trouble is coming, and it is but right and fitting that you should be prepared. I see it in the distance, and there is something in the atmosphere of this house that stifles me. And, young lady, for your kindness to me this day, old Master may enable me to be of great service to you. I know not in what way, but I feel sure of it."

"Thee has frightened the child," cried her aunt, seeing that May drew back, pale and trembling.

"How can I help it, if I am sent from old Master? Must I not deliver my message? If she had not been what she has to me, I might have let her gone on in ignorance, and the blow would have fallen heavily. But she was kind to the old man, who has not received much kindness in this world, and she reminds him of a little daughter that once called him father, and whose blue eyes he has not seen for nearly thirty long years. But I shall see her before I die, because I have asked old Master, and he says I shall. If it had not been for the memory of that little blue-eyed girl, I should have hated all womankind, in spite of old Master, perhaps; who knows?"

The women both looked at the old man with awe which they could not repress, and on May's face was a shade of fear.

"Do you think *I* am going to die?" asked May, her blue eyes distended, her cheeks still pale.

"No, young lady. The blow, for it is a sudden one, will not be aimed at you. You will suffer for another, not for yourself. But if you ask him, old Master will comfort you; he always does me. But I must be going. I hope my finger will be well soon; if not, why I can fast awhile."

May kindly proposed to put up some provisions for him,

while her aunt asked him to let *her* see the finger. The former proposition he eagerly accepted, while to the latter he replied by holding out a hand almost as white as a woman's, and scrupulously clean.

"I see," said aunt Hannah, "it is a splinter, and as I am something of a doctress, I think I can remove it. There," and she dexterously probed the inflamed place with a needle, and after a while brought out the substance. Then she wrapped it in a little poultice of bread and milk, directed him what to do, and listened to his thanks composedly.

He had reached the door and lifted his gun, when, confronting him upon the threshold, stood Rafe Le Forest, his black eyes sparkling at sight of May. Suddenly he turned, his glance encountered that of the strange old hunter, in whom a wild fury seemed lighted. His eyes blazed; his lips were parted, and appeared to strive in vain for utterance; his breath came quick and hard; his gun dropped from his nerveless hand, and laid unnoticed at his feet. In a moment more, however, he had recovered himself. He caught his breath hard, compressed his lips, and his whole frame relapsed into its ordinary composure. As he picked up the weapon, he said, sternly:

"Out of my light! Stand aside! You come of an accursed race!"

Rafe, really frightened, stepped nimbly away, and stood looking after him as he strode off, with a lowering brow.

"Who is he? Who *can* he be?" cried May, in tones of unfeigned terror.

"Old Sam knows better than I do; and yet it seems to me I've heard them tell of an old mad hunter who has been seen, for the last two years, in this vicinity," said Rafe, still looking after the retreating figure of the old man, as he nervously pulled up his glove till, unconsciously, he had torn it. "Upon my word! there he stops at our door. The old fellow can read, then. I wonder if he can be going in? No. See, he shakes his fist at the house. Pooh! he's a crazy old thing, and must be looked after. They always have a spite toward some particular persons. But is my sister Rose here?"

May replied that she had not seen *her* at all during the day.

"That's strange; she said she would call. Well, I suppose you anticipate having a merry time at the ball?"

"I don't know," said May, absently, still under the influence of that strange visit.

"Ah, we'll have a gay time. Rose thinks she's going to be the belle of the ball, but I know somebody that, with all her good looks, she can't hold a candle to;" and his bright black eyes glanced saucily at hers, growing yet bolder and more brilliant as he noticed the blush that overspread her face. "You know you promised the opening dance with me," he said, gayly.

"Yes, I remember that, of course."

"And I shall claim it. The old savage is out of sight," he added, looking down the street. "I don't wonder he's a hermit, for if he didn't shun his kind they would shun him. I'm pretty sure I'd keep at a safe distance. It's evident he has no particular fancy to cultivate my acquaintance. Good-by till to-night."

CHAPTER III.

WHAT PEOPLE SAID ABOUT THE AGENT.

MAY had scarcely seated herself and taken up her knitting, before in burst another visitor. This time it was Rose Le Forest, her eyes dancing in her head with some lively emotion, her cheeks redder than was natural.

"Oh, May, I've had such a fright!" she cried, seating herself, and making ludicrous efforts to recover her breath. "Do you know I met a crazy man on the street, and he stopped and looked at me so! The queerest-looking individual you ever saw, with red things on his hat, and a great long beard. Oh, dear, shall I ever get my breath? I wish you could have seen him."

"I have seen him," said May, gravely. "I gave him something to eat."

"Oh, dear me!" cried Rose, with an affected start, "you're not in earnest, May Rogerly."

"Yes, I am in earnest. Aunty will tell you so; she has just cleared off the dishes."

"How in the world could you let such a creature come in your doors? Why, I wonder he didn't murder you all. Just his looking at me made me run."

"He seemed harmless enough," said Aunt Hannah, "and ate his dinner peaceably, like a Christian. Besides, he's not dirty; his hands were as clean as thine, and I ain't sure but a trifle whiter," added the good Quaker, with a spice of fun, for she had always disliked Rose Le Forest.

Rose's red cheek grew redder, but she did not dare to answer, for she knew that Aunt Hannah's tongue was as keen as her own. She only said, curtly:

"Well, I guess if you knew who he was, you wouldn't have been so anxious to let him come to your house."

"Why, who is he?" queried May, nervously.

"The hermit hunter, I expect—some call him the mad hunter—who has a cave, or hut, or something, ten miles out in the woods. I've heard father speak of him. He says he is a murderer; that he has killed several people, but always escaped detection, and that if he gets offended with anybody, he had just as lief shoot 'em down as not. I believe it, indeed I do. He is so bloodthirsty that he don't dare to live among civilized men."

"I wonder if it *can* be so?" murmured May.

"Why, to be sure it is. People wouldn't say what they do for nothing."

"He was so gentle to me," murmured May.

"Well, he wasn't to me, you had better believe," said Rose, hotly. "Why, if a look would have killed me, I never should have come here;" and she shook out her flounces angrily.

"And he spoke so tenderly about a little girl he had once, with blue eyes. I wonder if she is dead," continued May, with the same dreamy look.

"I suppose he said you reminded him of her," said Rose, with a sneer, that was lost, however, upon her friend.

"Why, yes, he did; and another thing he said, that if it wasn't for the memory of her, he'd hate all women. He has had some dreadful trouble, I know."

"I should think so, if all accounts are true," retorted Rose. "Murdered some poor woman, as like as not."

"I don't believe he ever murdered anybody," said May, with vehemence.

"I tell you my father knows him, and says he did," cried Rose.

"Well, he don't look like such a man to me," said May. "He is crazy, perhaps, though he acted sane enough in most things. I suppose if you hadn't appeared to notice him he wouldn't have noticed you. Though, to be sure," she added, after a moment's thought, "you do look like your brother."

"Well, and what has that to do with it?"

"Why he seemed to know him, and treated him as if he had some spite against him. Rafe came here to inquire after you," she added, to Rose's glance of inquiry. "Yes, I dare say he is crazy; such unfortunates take dislikes to different people. That accounts for it."

"Oh, May, how pretty your flowers are. I'm afraid you can't spare me any for to-night."

"Yes, I can, as many as you want; that is, if you don't want them all," she added, laughing, "for you know they make the room so bright in winter."

"Some of these lovely red ones, and a few sprigs of the box. Oh, dear me, I wish papa would build a conservatory, and then I could always have flowers in my hair, they are so becoming to me. But he says it would cost so much. See here, what a beautiful shade of ribbon. I bought it this afternoon to go with the roses;" and she unfolded two yards of cherry-colored ribbon. "There! isn't it lovely?"

"Rather bright for my taste," said May, reflectively.

"Of course it wouldn't look so well on you," responded the brunette, holding it off admiringly, mentally viewing it on her own brilliant complexion, "but with black eyes, you know one must wear high colors. What are you going to wear?"

"White," responded May.

"White! Why, you've worn that everywhere."

"I know it, but father doesn't think enough of such places to buy me new dresses," said May, her countenance falling. "I know I haven't any thing else."

"Dear me, I don't know what I should do if father didn't

get me new dresses as often as I want them, for I get so sick of a thing after I've worn it a while, and I'm sure papa is only your father's agent—he's not half so rich. He always makes a little fuss over it, but I *will* have it, and he knows I will."

"If my father says no to me, that is enough," responded May.

"Well, it would break my heart to have my father say no to me, that's all *I* can say," was the rejoinder of Rose. "Oh, May," she cried, the thought suddenly occurring, "I've seen —guess."

"I'm sure I can't guess *who* you've seen," said May.

"No, perhaps not. Well, then, I've seen the new teacher. May, he's the handsomest man I ever laid my eyes on. Why, there'll positively be nobody in town after this. Raphael is going to send him a ticket, and, May, I'm bent on a conquest, so you needn't try."

"I never try for such things," said May, almost indignantly.

"Oh, of course not, you innocent creature! I suppose they come without trying—eh? But positively, I shall let no one else have this handsome stranger. Why, May, you can't think—he looks more like a duke than a common school-teacher. Oh, the contrast between him and red-headed, bow-legged John Saunders."

"Where did you see him?" queried May, feeling all a young girl's interest in the new arrival.

"Standing on the hotel steps, and he looked at me. I wonder if he'll board round, like Saunders? If he does I'll certainly have him at our house. But then I expect he's as poor as a parson, and papa declares I shan't have anybody but a rich man," she added, her face clouding. "I do believe pa'd be delighted if your father would marry me."

May was shocked, and uttered an exclamation betraying as much.

"Oh, you needn't be afraid, I shan't lay any traps for him," she continued, laughing heartily, "though I do expect he's ever so rich, and would set a young wife up splendidly. Why, child, you actually look as if you were afraid of me."

"The idea was so ridiculous," said May, faintly laughing. "Papa never intends to marry again; if he did," she said, almost defiantly, "I'd never forgive him."

"Why how spunky you *can* be!" laughed Rose, still bantering. "You don't know what a delightful step-mother I should make. You should have every thing you wanted, for you and I would be like sisters, and dress both alike. Wouldn't this old house have to undergo some fixing, though? On second thought I think I'd have it pulled down and build one like ours. And we'd have a carriage and a splendid pair of horses, and go riding every day—why, May, you're not going to cry over it!" she said, sobering down a little.

"I don't like to hear you talk so," said the young girl, her soft blue eyes swimming in tears, for, strangely enough, she connected these wild, random words, with the prediction made by the old hunter, and it seemed as if, in spite of her good sense and strong nerves, she felt the cloud that was lowering over their house.

"Well there, I'll be good. Of course you know that I'm in fun, that I love youth and beauty too well to marry an old man with gray hair, even if he would make me his darling, which I don't think he would, for I have a fancy that neither your father nor your aunt care much about me. There goes the widow; I wonder what she wants to see father so much for, lately?"

May looked out as she said this. A slight figure, draped in a plain shawl and close black bonnet entirely out of fashion, passed by. May caught a glimpse of her face and was greeted by a sad smile, for the sweet face, almost colorless, never looked happy or heart whole. She had known nothing but care for years, and it was wearing her down to an early grave. Rose continued :

"She's as proud as Lucifer. I offered her one of my old dresses. She might at least have been thankful for it for one of the children, but she drew herself up, and says she, 'No, Miss, not from you.' 'Oh, well,' says I, 'it makes no difference.' I wouldn't give her any thing if she was starving. But I must go; we ought to be all ready at seven. Raphael is intending to hire a carriage, and we shall come after you precisely at a quarter of seven. Now be sure and be ready. I shan't tell you what I'm going to wear, but it's something handsome," and away she tripped.

May felt confused and a little unhappy. The prediction

of the old man still sounded in her ears, and the malicious little speech about the white dress, with which she had hitherto been very well contented, completed her discomfiture.

"I shall look so plain to-night," she said to her aunt, who came in from her work to rest awhile. "I know I shall feel ashamed among strangers. Rose always dresses so splendidly."

"Yes, and in my eyes always looks like a dowdy," responded Miss Hannah. "Besides, her father can't stand such extravagance long. People begin to talk of it, and so my brother does too. I often hear him speak about Le Forest's launching out so, and say that he couldn't do it—it would soon ruin him. According to some things he's let drop, it wouldn't surprise me if he was going to turn him off, before a great while."

"Oh, aunt!"

"Thee needn't say any thing about it—not for the world," said Miss Hannah, "but I believe he's found some accounts go wrong. But there, I've no right to tell thee these things. Of course thee won't tell."

"I never tell any thing, aunt."

"And people do say he's getting all the property away from that widow. It's a shame, and God will punish him, for he has the good of poor lone people especially at heart, and he won't allow them to be trampled upon. How very strange it was in that poor man to call him old Master!"

"Yes, it was strange—but auntie, I must begin to dress. I suppose it's foolish to wish, but I expect I shall wish more than once that I had a new dress for the ball."

"Thee would look silly, child, to go in any thing but white to a ball. 'Tis the only proper dress for such occasions. Sister Alice, who married into the world's people, poor thing, always wore white, although she could well afford the richest and the best. Stop a minute,"—aunt Hannah bent her brows and pursed up her mouth—"it seems to me that I have a sash that sister bought in Paris—the most beautiful thing, all gold. I'll go up and see—yes, I know I have. That will set thee off. Now look at me fixing up world's people for balls. Well, well, thee knows what I think of them, though they will do thee less harm than they would some folks. But I'll go and see."

Two hours after, old Mr. Rogerly sat bolt upright before the fire, reading. A light touch upon his arm startled him; he looked up to see a fair vision, shy and smiling, waiting for his approval. There could hardly be a more beautiful thing than May looked at that moment, as in her floating, gossamer robes, the glossy, wavy folds of her hair brightened here and there by a delicate blossom, and the broad, long sash, with its frostwork of gold, encircling her pretty figure and falling heavily down almost to the hem of her gown. He surveyed her in silence for a moment; his eye glistened, his cheek reddened; he bent his glance upon the paper again, as with a quivering lip he murmured, "You look like your mother, child."

CHAPTER IV.

THE SCHOOLMASTER AT THE BALL.

AMID the merry hum of voices, and the brilliant throng of laughing girls, May Rogerly stood almost a stranger. Quietly taking off her wraps, she noticed, with something of a pang, the splendor of Rose, and her evident ease among so many new-comers. Rose wore a dress of flaming tarleton, tucked to the waist, each tuck elaborately spangled. White satin shoes, with white rosettes of enormous size, made her feet seem quite fairy-like in their proportions, while her black hair fell in a shower of curls, almost to the long point of her bodice.

"I never saw any thing so beautiful," thought unsophisticated May, looking at the shining eyes and red cheeks. "She needn't be afraid of *me*—any man might admire her."

It was the first ball that had ever been held in the town, and great pains had been lavished upon the hall. The girls of the village had brought garlands and evergreens the day before, and decked the walls profusely with wreaths, festoons, and grotesque figures, that meant nothing, but possibly added to the show. Four long hoops were suspended at different points, and these were so arranged with movable lamps, that

the light was scarcely inferior to gas. And when the brilliant throng came in, rejoicing in every variety of dress and feature, a more animated and pleasant scene could scarcely be imagined. May tried to enjoy it, but, be as gay as she might, the words of the old hunter would recur to her, and the ominous black cloud seemed to be hovering over her head. Once Rose came to her in one of the pauses, with a compliment.

"You look as pretty as you can, May; I half envy you," she whispered. "Where did you get that sash? Everybody is speaking of it. Not anywhere round here, for love or money. Did your father open his heart?"

"Aunt Hannah had it stowed away among her valuables," said May.

"Aunt Hannah! A Quaker have such things!"

"It belonged to another aunt whom I never saw, and was bought in Paris—so aunt Hannah says."

"Why you fortunate girl!" exclaimed Rose; "it must have cost so much, too—oh! May, there he is!"

Scarcely were the words spoken before Rose bounded away, leaving May looking over her shoulder into vacancy, for as yet she had discovered no stranger. Another turn in the dance, however, brought into view a face and form which on the instant riveted her attention. Taken singly, not one of the features would be called handsome, save the luminous, deep-set eyes, that were remarkable for their intensity of expression. The combined effect of the whole, however, was singularly fascinating. His hair, carelessly arranged, or rather not arranged at all, for it seemed to group itself into picturesque waves and shining curls, was parted very near the center of the high, dark forehead. About the mouth one might fancy there was an expression of grief, and nothing was so rare as the smile which, when talking, occasionally illuminated his face. He stood near the door, conversing with the former teacher, who had recently received a minor appointment in some college, his arms folded, his attitude one of unconscious grace. His friend seemed pointing out different persons in the room, indicating their proximity by a careless nod of the head, and May felt her face flush as she noticed that at last she seemed to be singled out, and that for some time the eyes of the new teacher were riveted upon her. Had

she been conscious of their comments, it might have deepened her blush, or sent her trembling from the room.

"Who do you say that young lady is?"

"The daughter of Mr. Rogerly—the richest man in the place," was the reply.

"And yet she is the most simply dressed and retiring girl in the room."

"You may well say that. There is nothing like vanity or presumption in little May Rogerly. She's a lovely child—one of my best scholars a year ago."

"She is decidedly the most attractive young lady here," said the new master, his eye following her motions.

"So I think," responded his friend, "and yet I suppose most persons would give the preëminence to Miss Le Forest."

"Le Forest," cried the young man, in a voice like a smothered moan, "Miss Le Forest."

"Yes," replied his companion, not noticing the terrible agitation that accompanied the words, "that showy, dashing girl with the brilliant black eyes. She's accounted the belle and beauty here. But I wouldn't give a fig for her mind—not a fig."

"Le Forest," muttered the teacher again, in a voice that trembled, while his lips had grown colorless.

"Yes—why, man, are you smitten so soon?"

"I beg your pardon," returned his companion, smothering his emotion, "I think I do not see her."

"That over-dressed young lady biting her fan just this minute ;" said the other, who could not but notice and wonder at the change in his friend. "You see her, of course?"

"Yes, I see her ; but who is she?"

"Her father is agent for Mr. Rogerly—transacts all his glass-house business I expect, though *I* wouldn't put a second-hand New York shaver in any position of responsibility—not *I*."

"He was a broker, then," said the young teacher, as if replying to his own thoughts—a smothered hate or passion in his voice. "Le Forest. Great heaven! can it be the same?"

"Now they are seated—let me introduce you."

"Not for worlds to—stop," he passed his hand hastily over

his forehead, "I believe I must confess to a little nervousness to-night, Saunders—it's so long since I have attended a place of this kind, or any amusements—fully ten years. But excuse me; you are waiting and I am ready."

The two young men crossed the hall. May's heart beat almost audibly, as she felt that they were advancing toward her. She could not help knowing that she had been John Saunders' favorite scholar. Her eye, at the moment of the introduction, fell upon Rose, who, with an engrossed glance, utterly forgetful of the partner at her side, was watching her every motion, her vehement nature feeling already the pangs of jealousy.

May was conscious that she appeared little at her ease, and bit her lips at her own awkwardness; but when, after the schoolmaster had gone the rounds, she still at times saw his earnest glance riveted upon her with an interest that, though she did not understand it, flattered her, she began to wonder at her own emotion. There was more than one interested spectator of the teacher's almost open admiration. Rafe Le Forest's bold black eyes flashed fire, as he felt that in May's eyes he had lost his old attractiveness.

"What do you think of the new teacher?" he asked of her, as she stood silent at his side.

"I think, as Rose said, he is remarkably handsome," replied May, blushing in spite of herself.

"And I think," said Rafe, pulling at the tassel of his white glove, "that he is a conceited fop."

May smiled, mentally contrasting the two.

"Why does he stand there like a dignified donkey, as if he looked down upon us all," said Rafe, hotly, his temper increased by her significant smile. "He's nothing but a teacher, and a poor one at that, I'll wager."

"Perhaps he don't know how to dance," said May.

"Then he's no gentleman."

"My father," said May, with emphasis, her blue eye flashing, "never danced a step in his life."

"Dancing was not once considered an indispensable part of a gentleman's education, as it is now," replied Rafe, an apology in his voice and manner. "Your father is not a young man, Miss May, and the case is widely different. If

any one said in my hearing your father was not a gentleman, I'd—I'd—knock him down."

"For which service I'm afraid papa wouldn't thank you," said May, laughing.

"But you would, May; you'd think all the better of me for defending the old gentleman's good name."

"I can tell better when the opportunity occurs," replied May; "in the mean time, I'll take my seat, if you please, and thank you for a glass of water."

Rafe went off with alacrity, and when he returned, what was his indignation to see the strange schoolmaster seated beside the beautiful girl, talking and smiling as readily as if he had known her for years.

At that moment a fierce hate sprung full-grown in the bosom of the agent's son, that was deepened and darkened when May stood up in the next dance with the noble-looking stranger, and with an innocent and undisguised triumph, nodded her head to him, as though she had said, "You see, according to your own interpretation of things, he is a gentleman."

Rose's heart swelled with envy and a sense of undeserved neglect. She had been so conscious of her own attractions, that to have them overlooked, and the child-face of the girl over whom she had assumed superiority preferred to hers, that she could with difficulty conceal her chagrin. She grew pettish toward her partners, and angry at herself. All sorts of malicious thoughts centered in her bosom toward the unconscious girl. She longed in some way to mortify and humble her; and when, as before, after the dance, Mr. Minot—for that was the name of the new-comer—sat down by her side, and, heresy saddest of all, honored no other young lady by proposing for her hand during the remainder of the evening, her anger was almost too strong to control.

And so the ball-room, that night, was the theater of evil passions, in which two of the actors prepared the way for ultimate misfortune, if not disgrace.

"Have you company home?" asked the attentive master, as he waited upon May to the cloak-room.

"The young lady came under *my* charge," said Rafe,

haughtily, as with an insolent movement he brushed past Mr. Minot.

The latter surveyed him coolly for a brief second, bowed to May, whose lips were quivering with indignation, said, hastily, "I beg your pardon," and retreated into the hall.

"Well, I hope you have enjoyed your monopoly of the illustrious stranger to-night," said Rose, with a mocking laugh, that sounded almost hysterical. "Everybody saw that he was hopelessly smitten. Rafe, you will have to call him out!"

"I don't know what you mean, Rose," said May, with spirit. "If Mr. Minot paid me the attention that any other gentleman might, I don't know that I solicited, though I certainly did appreciate it, for he is a man one might be proud to call a friend."

"Hear her," cried Rose, concealing a sneer with difficulty; "this is what I call progression. Well, I wish you joy of your conquest. Of course none of the girls here would presume to stand in competition with Miss May Rogerly, the daughter of the richest man in town. I wonder how people find out so easily who is wealthy?"

This covert insinuation grieved May more than it angered her. She had heard it so often from the envious Rose, that she had come to dread the implication of wealth, as if it was something to be ashamed of.

"No doubt our schoolmaster is going to be sure on which side his bread is buttered," said Rafe, sulkily; for he had never before doubted that he stood first in May's estimation, and he was not accustomed to be crossed.

It roused all the latent fury of his nature. He inherited from father and mother an evil, malicious temper, that when roused knew no bounds; and at this very moment he was grinding his teeth, while in imagination he held the writhing schoolmaster by the neck.

Several more well-aimed shots roused May's indignation at last, and she protested against their unkindness, assuring them with spirit that she was perfectly independent and free to act for herself, and she should not come to them, either of them, to consult them with reference to her choice of companionship.

The carriage had stopped as she ended, and the little lady, excited more than she had ever been before in her life, sprung out alone, before Rafe could come to her assistance, had he been ever so willing.

And so ended her first ball.

"I haven't been happy at all," she said to herself, as, seated in a low chair in her chamber, she mused upon the events of the evening. - And yet—and yet there came a strange new sense of exquisite pleasure, as she remembered the musical voice and earnest eyes of Mr. Minot. He had not talked of frivolous things, such as formed the staple of Rafe's conversation—had not once complimented her—had spoken slightly of such entertainments, and yet all he said showed such vigorous and manly thoughts that she had unconsciously formed the highest conception of his mental attributes.

CHAPTER V.

THE FAMILY QUARREL.

IT was early in the morning. The Le Forests had not yet eaten breakfast. In fact, Rafe and Rose were not up yet, it being by no means their practice to rise with the sun. The room was in disorder, for the young people had had company the previous night and left every thing in confusion. In the midst of this medley sat Mrs. Le Forest, very red in the face, rocking back and forth in a crimson rocker with all the energy of which she was capable, and talking volubly. Mr. Le Forest stood at the window, frowning as he looked out, and patting the carpet with his foot. Though gross and heavy in his general appearance, he still bore the remnant of the good looks that had formerly distinguished him, and which led his wife to say frequently to her daughter in the presence of company, "My dear, your father has been called the handsomest man in New York," and if alone, she generally had the vanity to add, "and I was a belle ten years after I had married." Miss Rose often had the audacity to doubt

this latter clause, for if this had been a fact, it could not be denied that Mrs. Le Forest, during the latter part of her life, must have changed amazingly.

As she sat there pouting, her streaked gray hair hanging over the sides of her face, her dirty chintz dressing-gown exposing a much soiled skirt, her rumpled cap-strings tied loosely under her double chin, forty, fat and not fair—her face evidently under the dominion of the sulks, as her snapping black eyes proved, she would have tried the equanimity of a less gentle person than Paul Le Forest.

"Le Forest," said the lady, leaning forward as she spoke, and partly turning toward him, "there's no kind of sense in your speaking in that positive way. The children haven't given a party, a real party, for a year, and the poor things can't keep up with the fashion at all. It wouldn't cost over a hundred dollars the way I could manage, and you know how economical I can be."

"Yes, save at the spigot and run out at the bung-hole," sneered the gentleman of the house. "Do you know what Rafe's horseflesh costs me?"

"Don't be so vulgar, Paul; your son's name is Raphael, after the *divine* Rafael. But there, what can I expect—you have no sympathy for the fine arts."

"If by the fine arts you mean the art with which that boy wheedles money out of my pocket, I have a good deal of sympathy," said Paul Le Forest, contemptuously. "I tell you his extravagance—your extravagance, unitedly, is ruining me."

"I'm ashamed of you, Paul Le Forest," expostulated his larger if not better half, jerking the tie out of her night-cap strings, and growing redder in the face, "talking so of your own wife and children. If we are expensive, you had better get rid of us as you have of some other things in your life."

This taunt was repented of as soon as spoken, for Paul Le Forest turned upon his wife with the face of a demon. His rage was so excessive that his eyeballs fairly started from his head, and in the dearth of words that could not come from his swelling throat, he kicked one of the footstools near him with such force that he sent it flying over his wife's head

against the glass of a costly engraving, and shivered it to atoms.

"You brute!" cried Mrs. Le Forest, springing up from her chair, but yet cowering as she met his glance.

"I shall commit murder some day," growled the infuriated man, looking her down. Then turning to the window he took out his watch—put it back again—said, impatiently, "I want my breakfast," and strode out of the room.

As much as she feared her husband, the presence of the son and daughter who came crawling down to breakfast in any thing but becoming *dishabille*, emboldened her to speak of the party, and nothing daunted at the threatening look he gave her as she opened her lips, she put in her plea again.

"Oh! yes, father," Rose chimed in, shaking back her disordered curls, "pet wants a party, and pet *must have* a party."

"And pet's brother too," echoed Raphael, mocking his sister's voice and manner.

"There is no use in your teasing me," said the broker, "not a particle of use—I can not and *shall not* let you give a party. I tell you I am embarrassed, and before long I expect to sell house, horse and every thing else. Then you won't think of parties when you have a crust of bread to live upon."

"Oh! pa, we've heard that threat so often it don't frighten us a bit now," said Rose, saucily. "Besides, if you were so badly off, you wouldn't have bought that handsome new gig."

"I took that for a debt."

"I wish you'd turn over some of your debts to me," said Raphael, tossing down his coffee. His father's face flushed.

"How long are you going to let that widow stay in the cottage?" asked Rose.

"I shall sell it the first chance," said the broker.

"She's running about everywhere telling her grievances," said Rafe.

"Let her tell," responded Paul Le Forest; "she owes me fairly and squarely. Women think they can do any thing with tears," he said, savagely, looking at his wife.

"But, papa, we *must* give a party, because I've spoken of it," said Rose, anxiously.

"Yes, papa, we must give a party, for we intend to entrap

a solemn and mysterious stranger, who knows how to use his eyes and hold his tongue," sneered Rafe.

"What! that new schoolmaster?" exclaimed Paul Le Forest, excitedly. "He had better keep out of my house. Would you give countenance to your father's worst enemy?"

"Why, what do you mean, papa?" queried Rose, while Rafe, silenced by his father's manner, could only look the questions he could not speak.

"I mean that the scoundrel is worming himself into the good graces of old Rogerly, and intends to get me deposed if he can, and be my successor."

"I told you that fellow knew on which side his bread was buttered," said Rafe, bitterly. "And then I suppose he expects to marry May Rogerly."

"Probably that is his intention—but I know a thing or two that will perhaps put a stop to that pretty little romance. Look here, it is time for me to be at the works, confound them!"

"And you won't tell us whether we may give ever so little a party," murmured Rose, dolefully.

"I tell you no," he exclaimed, with some vehemence. "I believe you all of you want to work my ruin. I tell you I'm head over heels in debt, and what's worse, am likely to remain so, unless something turns up. Don't let me hear another word about this party—not another word. As for that scamp, Minot, I wish you to have nothing whatever to do with him. He's a fellow without family and without means. You see how he has avoided us, and good reasons he has for it, too. I'll make him sweat before I'm done with him."

So saying he went out, leaving a disappointed, angry group behind him.

CHAPTER VI.

STEALING ON A LARGE SCALE.

WENDING his way to the office much earlier than there was any need of, fully an hour before either the clerks, book-keeper or Mr. Rogerly ever came, Mr. Le Forest entered the general office. Leading from this was a little closet with one window facing east, which the book-keeper occupied. This book-keeper was a very honest but exceedingly careless young fellow, who had not been long in Mr. Rogerly's employ. He had taken him at the solicitation of a relative, and though not quite satisfied with his habits, which were none of the neatest, he knew he could confide in his honesty. Carefully hanging his outside coat and hat on a peg beside the door, the man began fumbling in his pocket, and at length, with many signs of trepidation, brought out a folded paper, from which he took a key and applied it to the lock of the book-keeper's door.

"It fits," he muttered, triumphantly, and looking around him guiltily, he turned the key, opened the door, and entered. Walking straight up to the desk, he tried it, and found it unlocked. "What a careful fellow Spangler is!" he muttered, laughing to himself. "I dare say he thinks the desk is locked, or else he has lost the key."

As he stood at the desk, the window facing to the east was directly behind him. It did not give a clear light in consequence of the huge trunk of a tree that lifted itself opposite. Now as he took a book containing the most recent entries from the desk, and placed it before him, a figure became visible from behind the tree, and gradually nearing the window, revealed the tall proportions of the mad hunter, a stealthy, half-ferocious expression making him look more savage than ever. Cautiously he crept to one side of the window, where he could observe all that was going on within, and stealthily he watched, silent, immovable, like a man cut in stone.

Paul Le Forest, meantime, scanned the last pages of the

book before him, leaning on both elbows, and making hurried calculations.

"Three pages, all in January," he muttered to himself. "Good heavens, what a business! This man must be making an immense fortune. Well, here at one fell swoop go three thousand," and with a dexterous movement he tore out the last page, erased all indications of its having filled the place, and chuckled as he folded up the abstracted paper, and placed it cautiously in his pocket-book. "Lucky there isn't a continuation of this page," he added, as he looked at his successful exploit, "and deucedly lucky that the fellow didn't page the blank leaf. Well, that's over, and old Rogerly may help himself if he can."

He thrust the book back in the desk, looked carefully around to assure himself that his witnesses were all dumb, went quickly into the general office, and an hour after, when the proprietor came in, he seemed busily at work. Mr. Rogerly glanced at him once, twice, suspiciously, but spoke pleasantly in answer to the beaming smile that greeted him from his unfaithful agent.

"Good-morning, Le Forest," he said; "it's good, keen, winter weather."

"Fine weather, for the season," responded the agent.

"Did you get those bills in from the West?" queried the careful man of business.

"Some of them came readily. The rest I shouldn't wonder if you have some trouble with. Are you sure Jones' house is safe?"

"Well, it's as safe as any house of the same pretensions; a little fast, perhaps."

"So I thought," replied Le Forest.

"In fact, there's as great a tendency to fast living in individuals as in firms," replied the old man, with a meaning look.

Paul Le Forest's brow grew red.

"It's a great mistake," he continued, "and a ruinous experiment. Now I've been in business for forty years, and pride myself that I am not altogether unsuccessful, but I never owned a fast horse yet."

"You have no sons, Mr. Rogerly."

"No, and it's well I haven't, if fast horses had to take the place of good business habits. Such a son would mortify me, with my old-fashioned notions of work and honesty, to death."

"You need not disguise the fact that you are talking at me," said Mr. Le Forest, with some heat.

"I am talking *to* you, Mr. Le Forest, if you will listen to me. I am aware that I shall run the risk of being called a fool and a meddler for my pains, but it does strike me, that with such an opening as there is in this very house, you might prevail upon your son to steady down and make a man of himself, instead of driving round town with gloves on, and boasting of how much he can drink, and how much his father makes out of old Rogerly."

The man looked up alarmed as he said:

"What do you mean, Mr. Rogerly?"

"Just what I say, Paul Le Forest, and I say it in all kindness, too. Your son has said that in the hearing of a friend. It was not reported to me, nor intended to be, but it got to my ears."

"I should like to know who has been playing spy and informer; but I can guess," said Mr. Le Forest.

"I do not implicate any one," said Mr. Rogerly, gently, "neither do I think you have any idea who was my informant. I should not, perhaps, have spoken to you so plainly. I certainly should not, had I foreseen how you would take it. I am a plain, blunt man, and never get behind people's backs, but tell them, as I have told you, if I have any fault to find."

Le Forest began to think he had gone too far, and to tremble lest he should lose his place.

"I ought to thank you, sir," he said, with apparent frankness, extending his hand. "Indeed, I have often seen my error of late in being too indulgent to that boy, and if you had not spoken, was intending to cut off the horses and some other expenses. I am sure you are really my friend."

"I am by no means your enemy, Mr. Le Forest. I would be every man's friend, but I confess that I do hate idleness and dissipation, and seldom make any allowance for either. Good-morning, Spangler."

The young book-keeper, a rosy-faced, innocent-looking young man, pleasantly greeted the proprietor and his agent.

"I wonder who that queer-looking man is that I almost came bump against just now in turning the corner?" he said, throwing his cap on the desk, and then, at a look from Mr. Rogerly, hanging it in its proper place.

"I suppose it's the mad hunter, they call him," said Mr. Rogerly, turning over some loose papers in his hand. "I have heard that he was once a respectable man, and a merchant of character and standing."

"And I have heard that he was a dangerous person," said Le Forest, a shade of hate darkening his face. "Woe to the man who offends him—it is certain death."

"You know him, then," said Rogerly, quietly.

"Know him! Who said I knew him?" asked Le Forest, in a voice that seemed changed with fear.

"Not I," said Rogerly, in some surprise, noticing the changed look of his agent. "What I said was equivalent to a question. You spoke with such confidence that I thought he could not be a stranger to you."

"He *is* a stranger to me," replied Le Forest, "and so is—and so are some others who are trying to worm themselves into society here, but who have neither friends, character nor influence to back them up."

Rogerly was silent, still drawing out and looking over his papers.

"I don't see what the old hunter is doing here," he said, presently; "how he lives, I mean. My daughter gave him a dinner the other day, but he don't seem like a man who would get his living by begging."

"He'd rather steal it," said Le Forest, savagely. "I'd no more let him come into my house than I'd let a known assassin or burglar. If I—"

He stopped, his eyes distended, and fastened upon some object at the door. The proprietor followed his glance, but the mad hunter had turned away, after a fearful menace, and left the house by an opposite door.

"My head feels strangely this morning," said Le Forest, apologetically. "I believe I drank my tea too strong last night."

"Something stronger than tea, I guess," muttered Mr. Rogerly, as he left the office.

Meantime, the book-keeper had numbered a new page, and in blissful unconsciousness of the ruin intended by the wily agent, whistled softly over his work.

"I wonder who this Minot is?" queried the latter, as he sat idle for a moment, to Le Forest, who, pen in hand, stood toying with some paper on the desk before him. "He seems to be a capital good fellow, only rather grum and unsocial at times."

"Why do you ask?" responded Le Forest, without looking up.

"Because from his manners one would think he had been reared to expect an independent fortune. I thought the fellow was as proud as Lucifer, but come to get acquainted with him it's only his way. But I like him, because there's none of your make-believe about him—he's as honest as the sun."

"Honest!" sneered Le Forest. "I advise you as a friend, Spangler, to have nothing to do with him. What do you know about his antecedents? I hear that he is looking about for a wife, and I can guess pretty well who he intends to entrap. People with disgrace clinging to them can only save themselves by getting into some respectable family. I could tell Rogerly something, but I suppose it's none of my business." He knew the old man stood where he could overhear every word he said, and he was not indifferent to the satisfaction which base minds feel in revenging personal slights or fancied injuries. Rogerly had dared to call him to account, and he should dearly pay for it.

"What! does he come of a low family?" queried Spangler, his legs dangling as he lazily rocked himself to and fro.

"Worse than that," said Le Forest, in a low voice.

"Was any body hung before his generation?" laughed Spangler—"any of his venerable ancestors?"

"Worse than that," exclaimed Le Forest, emphatically.

"Good heavens! why what could be worse?" exclaimed the astonished youth.

"Not many things—but I have nothing further to say about it. You must go somewhere else for information," and he turned impatiently to his work.

"I say," cried Spangler, "it seems to me there's something left out here; didn't I set down an invoice to Stearns & Whitaker? Well, now that's queer, any way. Either I did or I dreamed it."

Le Forest looked up with a whiter face, as he said, "You dreamed it, I guess. There's been no very late order from him."

"Why yes there was; don't you remember you had the bill—let me see, wasn't it Tuesday?"

"No—I tell you I had no bill," responded Le Forest, almost angrily.

"Oh—well—then of course it's all right—your memory is better than mine; but it's strange that in that case I seem to recollect so plainly—and this page of figures looks queerly, somehow," and again he fell to his low whistling, dismissing the subject as he invariably did any thing that puzzled him.

Meantime old Rogerly was revolving in his mind what Le Forest could possibly mean when he spoke of Mr. Minot, who was giving great satisfaction as a teacher—even more than his successor; everybody respected him and all were pleased with his attentions. What had Le Forest against him?

"I don't like Le Forest," he soliloquized; "he seldom has a good word to say for any body, and I'm sorry he is in my employ. But then about this young man—if there is really any disgrace in the matter, and he seems to be coming to the house pretty regularly, why, I must know what it is. It would never do to let my little May fall in love with an adventurer. I don't care how poor he is, that's not the thing; I can help a poor man—though I wouldn't have lifted a finger for Le Forest's son, the prig. And I suppose that's what ails the father. He expected to boost his youngster into my regards by giving him a fast horse that I'll warrant isn't paid for yet. No, no; I'd sooner May died than married him."

"Well, Le Forest, what do you think of our new teacher?" he said, as some time after they were alone together.

"My opinion will have but little weight if yours is made up," said the agent.

"What makes you think mine is made up?"

"It is currently reported that he is waiting upon Miss May," was the reply.

"I wonder who circulated such a report?" said Mr. Rogerly, and his voice and manner certainly did imply that he at least suspected.

"That I don't know," said the agent, conscious that it might be laid at the door of his son, "but for reasons that I could tell I hoped it might not be so." The wary old man glanced keenly at his agent. If he questioned him it might seem as if there were some truth in the report—if he allowed it to pass current and the agent had any just cause of suspicion, then he was wronging his daughter.

"Le Forest," he said, at last, making up his mind, "what do you know against this young man?"

"Against Minot? Why nothing against him, personally, except that he is a man of sullen temper and considerable vanity."

"I could not help overhearing you when you spoke to Spangler—and your remarks certainly call for explanation from me. I have a particular reason in view why I wish to know what trouble there has been in his family—if any," he added, with marked emphasis. His manner stung Le Forest.

"I will tell you," he said, hastily, and going up to him he whispered a few words in his ear.

The old man never moved, but remained thoughtful, his chin resting upon his breast, his lips tightly closed. For some moments he did not speak—Le Forest watching him keenly. Presently he said, speaking as calmly as ever:

"Are you *sure*, Le Forest?"

"As sure as there is a heaven."

"Poor fellow!" muttered old Rogerly, and sighed.

"You know such things have their influence."

"Yes, yes, the innocent must suffer for the guilty—but it is hard, very hard!" and the old man shook his head. "I'm very sorry for the poor boy. What became of his father?"

"How can I tell?"

"I thought you might know. Well, well, his case calls for sympathy, certainly. I am not the one to add a feather to the weight he carries already—and I think," he added, rising slowly and speaking distinctly, "that he merits more consideration than ever." Saying this he went out, leaving Le Forest transfixed with anger and shame. The blow that he

had aimed at another, had recoiled against himself. Rogerly was evidently more favorably disposed toward young Minot than before, and his own and his son's prospects were correspondingly damaged.

"The old dotard—the beggarly old rascal," he muttered, between his shut teeth, "if I hated him before, I despise him now. Thank heaven he don't go into society, and I shall take care to make this place too hot to hold that young fool. He to cut my son! A pretty pass it has come to, if this young fellow is to take the bread out of our mouths. The trusting old fool! I'll rob his pockets to the tune of the salary he ought to pay me. Little he thinks whose money goes to the support of the horseflesh he makes such fuss over—but I'll make a living out of him while I stay in this place, or my name is not Paul Le Forest."

CHAPTER VII.

IN WHICH A FAST YOUNG MAN GETS VERY ANGRY.

MAY sat near her flowers, smiling and thinking. Of what she was thinking it would perhaps be needless to say, for within ten minutes young Minot had passed the window, and his strangely beautiful smile had set her heart to beating with heavy but happy throbs.

"He has the saddest and yet the sweetest smile I ever saw. I wonder what makes him look so sad?" Another shadow darkened the window. She looked up; it was Rafe, dressed with conspicuous elegance—and to do him justice, his taste was nearly faultless. The most fastidious connoisseur could have detected nothing *outre* in the fashion of his habiliments—nothing flashy or gaudy in the few ornaments he wore. Like other more distinguished individuals whom the world has noted, he gave his mind to it—and it was the result of intellect brought down and centered in a tailor's show-block.

Naturally she smiled, and he, taking it for encouragement, came in. Lounging into the seat that stood empty near her,

he ran one ungloved hand through his curls, and laughingly remarked that he saw the queen was in her bower of beauty—he supposed she would allow the humblest of her subjects to pay his court to her.

"Certainly," said May, laughing in reply, "my subjects are all humble."

"I wonder if they are all as loyal as I am?" he queried, in a low voice, and with a manner that made her blush.

"Where is Rose?" she asked, evading a reply.

"Rose—oh! I don't know—out somewhere. I don't know as I ever saw Rose sitting down, sewing as you do. What is the reason?"

"Rose is gayer than I, I suppose."

"Do you know I'd never get a wife like Rose?"

"Men seldom marry women like their sisters," May replied. "I presume she wouldn't marry a man like her brother."

"But would *you*, May?" he asked, leaning over toward her.

"No," said May, bluntly. He seemed discomfited for a moment.

"Then you can't reciprocate the compliment," he exclaimed banteringly.

"I can't tell an untruth—even in a compliment," she replied, "or as we are both talking now—in sport."

"I am not in sport," said Rafe, suddenly, grown quite sober. "May, if I could only think that some day you would like me, it would make a man of me—I know it would."

"You ought to be a man for your own sake—for the sake of your father and mother," said May.

"Oh, May—only let me hope!" he said, passionately.

"Raphael—Mr. Le Forest!" exclaimed May, "what are you thinking of? Why, we are both children—and besides, if we were ever so old, I could only," she could neither say esteem or like, "treat you as a friend. What would your father say? What would mine?"

"Hang what either of them would say!" exclaimed Raphael, in a husky voice, losing his manly bearing. "I don't care. And I don't care what becomes of me, either. You used to like me before that pup of a schoolmaster came here, confound him! And if you knew what I know about him, May Rogerly, you'd never allow him to darken your doors,

let alone admire you, and flatter you with that smooth face of his. I hate him!"

"Mr. Le Forest," said May, quietly, "you forget where you are, and who you are talking to. Mr. Minot never had the presumption to address one word of flattery to me. If he did, he would lower himself in my esteem, and I should set him down among some other young men of my acquaintance."

"Then, at present, he is at the top of your regard."

"I have heard that you have reported so," said May, her eyes flashing.

"Me—I'd scorn to soil my tongue with his name. Let what will be said of me, my parents are *honest*, thank God! while he, poor thing, if any one happened to say the word 'mother' to him, ever so accidentally, he'd knock him down."

"I never listen to inuendoes," said May.

"No, of course not, against the adorable Mr. Minot," said Rafe, coarsely; "less favored mortals might not escape so easily."

"Mr. Le Forest, your conduct is beneath my contempt," said May.

His eyes flashed, his lip quivered, his voice sounded hoarse and strange, as rising to go, he said: "Miss Rogerly, I wish you joy of your conquest; the next time he comes here, ask him, from me, when he last saw his mother;" and, bowing maliciously, the maddened boy hurried out of the house, longing only to wreak his vengeance on the man he considered his rival.

May sat still where he left her, the indignant blood making her cheeks blaze, her eyes flashing fire.

"If papa knew of his contemptible conduct," she said, to herself, "he'd shake him. I'm glad I said just what I did," she murmured, after a pause, laughing a little as she wiped the angry tears from her eyes; "how it took him down, the conceited fellow. He has always acted as if he considered himself irresistible, and now, I hope, he has lost a little of his good opinion of himself. It won't hurt him;" and she laughed again, looking at his chair which still stood before her, and in which he seemed to have left a little of his conceit. "But, perhaps he will torture what I said, and make it appear that

I confessed more interest in him—in Minot—than—than—I feel ;” and blushes suffused her face again. “ Well, I do—like him. He is infinitely superior to any of the young men here. He never talks nonsense, nor appears laboring under that silly admiration of women that constrains some men to think that they must forever be saying something of their personal appearance, as if that was all they thought of.”

Her father came in at that moment.

“ May, I wish you could paint on glass,” he said, abruptly.

“ I know who can,” responded his daughter, forgetting all her vexations.

“ Well, who ?”

“ Mrs. Barclay; she can do it.”

“ How do you know ?”

“ Because she showed me some specimens. She said she learned when she was a girl. Why, father ?”

“ Because I wish to get up some new fancy shades. I have set the designer to work, but shall keep the coloring a secret till they are in the market.”

“ Oh, father, will you give it to her ? they are so poor.”

“ To be sure I'll give it to her, if she can do it, and glad of the chance. But it seems to me she shouldn't be so very poor. She has the house.”

“ But, I believe she will have to lose it,” said May.

“ Lose it ! Why, how ?”

“ I don't know the real facts of the case,” said May ; “ but people blame Mr. Le Forest, so he has something to do with it.”

“ Ah !” and her father looked up, “ there goes that old hunter,” he said ; “ by the way, when I came by, he was just leaving Mrs. Barclay's house. I wonder what he went there for, or why he lurks about the town. I wonder if he is mad ? If so he is dangerous, and ought to be attended to at once.”

“ I don't think he would hurt anybody, unless it might be the Le Forests,” said May. “ The day he came here, he called Rafe some hard names, and said he came of an accursed family. So I suppose he has some grudge against them.”

“ The Le Forests are getting unpopular, *very* unpopular.”

said Mr. Rogerly. "There's something wrong about them all, I'm afraid."

"Father, may I go and tell the widow?" asked May.

"Yes, if you like. If, without seeming to meddle, you can find out any thing about the trouble between her and Le Forest, I wish you would," he added.

May put on her bonnet and cloak, and tripped along to the widow's house. A brisk walk brought her to the door in ten minutes. It was a pretty, unambitious little place, with four pillars under the porch, round which the dead vines still clung, tapping with their withered tendrils the glass-panes set in over the door. There was space for a pretty garden before, that always bloomed in summer, a field, for the pasture of a cow, and a square of ground for vegetables behind the house. Several fruit-trees grew not far off, furnishing apples and plums for the winter, while on the west side of the cottage thrifty grape-vines grew, producing grapes abundantly in their season.

In answer to her knock, a little girl of some nine summers came to the door. The child looked confused when May asked for her mother; but after a minute of doubt, during which she seemed to read the sweet face before her, she led the way to the back of the house, and timidly opening a door that led to the general sitting-room, signified that May should enter.

The widow, at first sight, sat near the table, her face upon her folded hands. When she looked up, the tears still rolling down her cheeks, she started, colored, and glanced reprovingly at the child, as she said, "You should have told me, Helen."

"Never mind, Miss May," she continued, as May excused herself, "we are in trouble, or, at least, I am. The children, poor things, are hardly old enough yet to realize how much they are about to be deprived of. Pray, sit down."

May took the offered chair, not failing to observe the extreme neatness of the apartment, in which the scant but pretty furniture shone again.

"I have come," said May, "to see if you could do some work for father."

"I shall be thankful," exclaimed the widow, her face

brightening, "to get any thing to do. My sewing is all out, and people complain of the hard times, so that I have very little to depend upon. I had to sell my cow last week; but—" here her lip quivered.

"This is painting on glass," said May. "I think you showed me some a few weeks ago, and I took the liberty of speaking of it, when father said he should like to have some done."

"Oh, that will be so much to my liking," cried the pale, pretty woman, her face lighting up; "that is, if I can suit your father."

"I have no doubt about that," said May, confidently. "The patterns are all drawn, and I know you have the taste to color them. And father says you must set your price; he is willing to pay you whatever you think is reasonable, taking into consideration the time and the colors."

"How kind!" exclaimed the poor woman, her tears starting again. "But how shall I know what to charge? And how fortunate that I have a full box of colors, scarcely used at all, that I was saving for the children. Never mind," she continued, seeing that their faces expressed some disappointment, "mother will earn enough to buy another box."

"I wish mother could earn enough to buy another house, don't you, Helen?" asked Mary; "because, you know," she added, looking sideways at May, "she's going to have this one taken away."

"Oh, don't talk of it, children. Do you know, Miss May, that the thought of losing this little property, which my poor husband presented me so proudly, as the earnings of his own hands, makes me as weak as a baby, whenever I think of it?"

"I hope you are not going to lose it," said May.

"Oh, yes we are; the man come and said we must," said Helen, who now stood quite near May, and even ventured to touch her arm. May took the little hand in hers.

"Yes, Mr. Le Forest is a very hard man," said the widow, her feelings overpowering her again. "I was so out of heart this morning, so tired of my isolation, that, what do you think I did?" She looked up, smiling a little through her tears.

May shook her head.

"Why, my children got talking with that wild-looking hunter you may have seen round here, lately, and nothing would do but he must come in to the fire. At first I was a little afraid of him, but he talked so sensibly, after a while, and so like a Christian, that I really felt to respect him. Poor man! he seems like one that has seen a good deal of trouble. Well, someway the conversation turned to the Le Forests, and I was foolish enough to tell him all my trouble. I couldn't help it; it seemed to be as natural as if I was talking to my father."

"And what did he say?" asked May, quite interested.

"Not a word. He listened like an Indian, his features immovable; but once or twice there came a terrible expression over his face, and I was afraid I had done wrong, for sometimes such people take it upon themselves to revenge the wrongs of others. I forgot—he did speak; he said, 'My old Master will see to him'—meaning, I suppose, God. After he had gone, I grew so nervous and uneasy that it seemed to me I could scarcely live. I am glad you came in, for I felt as if there was such a cloud over me."

"I wish you had come to my father with this trouble in the first place," said May, her face expressing the genuine pity she felt.

"He was a stranger to me; and, if he were not, my situation"—she paused. She could not tell the simple-hearted girl that the shafts of scandal are as ready for the good and pure as the fallen and imprudent. That the very name that should call for sympathy from the community, would be used unsparingly in ridicule and blame; that even the best of them would wonder if the widow was spreading her net for the rich old widower, by playing upon his sympathy. No, no; she had suffered too much from the even thoughtless sport of her neighbors, to lay herself liable to their censure, even should it be entirely uncalled for.

"When my father knows of this, I am sure he will call Mr. Le Forest to account," said May. "I don't believe he will keep a man in his employ who has acted so dishonestly. But I must go; and I may tell papa that you will do the work?"

"Yes, I think I can; I will try my best, at any rate, to please him."

"I am very sure you will," said May. "I will try and call upon you oftener; you must be lonely here. And you must let your little girls come and see me."

"Oh, may we, sometimes, mamma?" cried Helen, impulsively. "I like her so very much."

"So do I," chimed in Mary, who stood holding the hand of her twin-sister.

May smiled; the mother promised; and, kissing the children, the young girl bade them all a hasty good-by, and returned home.

CHAPTER VIII.

INSULTING THE TEACHER.

A GROUP of school-boys stood near the steps of the only hotel that graced the town of A——. Mr. Raphael Le Forest, lounging idly there, smoking and pretending to read, was yet listening eagerly to the several voices engaged in a dispute. Among the boys was an athletic young fellow whose name was Ned Boylston, and who commonly went by the appellation of Bully Ned, on account of his pugilistic propensities. This boy was the worst fellow in town, and gave the new teacher more trouble than all the rest, and as he had several times conquered him, the boy hated him with all the intensity of his mean nature.

"I say it's all your own fault, Ned Boylston," cried Charley Grayson, a fair-haired boy, "you know you have tried more than once to kick up a row, and nothing saved you from punishment but Mr. Minot's forbearance. If I'd been the teacher in that cistern case, I'd have beat you to a jelly."

"That is if you could, master bread and butter," retorted the bully, turning angrily upon him. "I say old Minot's a mean sneak, and I hate him."

"We always hate people who can conquer us, at least some folks do," said another. "We've got a master now that

knows his business, and if he gives any of us a thrashing once in a while, we deserve it." Several boys chimed in in the master's defense, three or four took the side of Bully Ned, and for a while there was a noisy controversy, during which Bully Ned's voice could be heard above all the rest, declaring that he would be even with him, he'd have his revenge yet, and sundry other exclamations testifying to his deep hatred. At last the group dispersed, all but Bully Ned, who vowed that he wouldn't go to school yet, he'd go late just expressly to irritate old Minot—and if he undertook to trouble him, he'd get the worst of it.

"See here, my boy," said a voice behind him. The lad turned, startled, perhaps expecting to see Minot, for he was, in spite of his cruelty and bravado, a great coward. "Come up into the portico here; I have something to say to you," said Le Forest.

The boy followed him, evidently in a state of great wonderment.

"So you don't like this new teacher, I understand," he said in a low tone.

"No," said the boy, reading a kindred spirit in the evil black eyes that were fastened upon him; "he's too confounded ugly, and whacks us for nothing."

"I heard you say you would like to be revenged upon him."

"So I should," said the bully, pushing his hands down deeper in his pockets, his dull eyes lighting up. "I'd like to have my revenge for *one* whipping at least."

"Could you whip him?" asked Rafe.

"Well, I don't know—I don't think I could unless I got mighty mad. He's pretty strong."

"Well, I think I could help you to your revenge in an easier way than that."

The boy looked up. "How?" he asked.

"If you will follow my directions and keep close, you'll not only get all the satisfaction you want out of him but earn five dollars from me."

The boy nodded his head with an expression of intense satisfaction.

"I'll do it, by jingo!" he said.

"Very well, then listen to me. Remember, you're not to back out."

"No, I won't back out," said the bully.

"If you do, you lose the five dollars, and if you inform against me, you lose the five dollars; but if you do every thing as I tell you, you shall have this gold piece," and he held the coin up to the boy's eyes.

"I'll do it, by jingo!" he said, stolidly.

"Well, then, see here. You must go in rather late. Does he punish you for that?"

"He does, unless one has a good excuse," replied the boy.

"And you will have no excuse?"

"Not unless I make one."

"Of course you will not do that. Now I'll tell you of a plan by which you can mortify him before the whole school—before the young ladies in the first classes, and the great boys who are almost men. When he calls you up—will he do that?"

"He most always does."

"Very well, then, when he calls you up, go; and if he threatens to punish you, you have only to say so loud that all the school will hear, *you'd better find out who your mother is.*"

"Is that all?" queried the boy.

"That's all; that will give you all the revenge you want. I shouldn't wonder if it sent him from the town."

"That *would* be bully," said the boy.

"Now you'll be sure to do it?"

"I'll be sure."

"And after school come straight to my house, and if I'm not there, my sister will be with the five dollars, which I'll leave with her. I'll try and be home, however, for I should like to hear the joke. See, it's past nine ten minutes; you'd better go now. It will be rich, though," chuckled Rafe, as the boy went off. "Wouldn't I like to be there about that time—it will mortify him to death—and serve him right, setting up such ridiculous pretensions. I'd like to see his face—and before those Avery girls, too—the tip-top aristocracy of the town!" and off went Rafe, mightily delighted with his plan.

Bully Ned was no less pleased with his prospective share of "the fun" as he thoughtlessly called it, and as he went along the road, pleased himself with fancying the dismay young Le Forest had predicted. He had great confidence in Rafe, all the fast boys looked up to him with respect, and followed his handsome figure or horse with unbounded admiration. The snow in the hedges, the icicles pendent from trees or spouts, had no attraction for him. As he came within sight of the school-house, his heart beat faster for a moment, but he measured his own proportions, and plucked up courage. He had long promised himself a hand-to-hand fight with the schoolmaster, and if worse came to worst, why he could whip him—perhaps.

The school-house was an unpretentious, long, one-story building, painted a greenish white. From the outside of one of the windows, Bully Ned could see the slender but well-knit form of Mr. Minot, standing just in front of his desk, apparently speaking to some class or individual. He entered the hall and hung up his cap, then opening the door, with an awkward step and peculiar side-look at the master, he went in and shuffled to his seat, winking to several kindred spirits who slyly put out their hand to pinch him, or in some way impede his progress. The master was quite busy with a class of the older girls, explaining their lesson in Geometry. He appeared to take scarcely any notice of the bully's entrance, but went in a little back closet to bring out the globes. This place was used as occasion required, to keep books and apparatus in. There was but little of the latter, however, and that shut up in a wooden case. The room had no window, and no egress, save with the school-room. When Mr. Minot came back, perhaps no one noticed that he quietly took the key from the inside and placed it upon the outside of the door. As he stood in his usual place, firm, commanding, handsome, it was little wonder that the girls, grown almost to womanhood, looked at his eyes as stars, or blushed when he caught them intently gazing at him, and hanging upon every thing he said.

Ellen Somers, a bright young creature, petted and spoiled at home, taught to believe herself a beauty—hated by the other girls because of her overbearing disposition, and who

had given the last teacher unheard-of trouble, had become, under Mr. Minot's tuition, as gentle as a lamb, not, as the girls said, without designs of her own—and in fact, with the young ladies, Minot never had any trouble. That he was looked upon with jealousy by some of the boys who considered themselves young men, was very apparent, but he was always firm, wise and considerate, so treating all with consistent justice and kindness, that no one had any reason to complain of his partiality.

After the class was through and had taken their seats, the master's eye traveled toward the place occupied by Bully Ned. The boy looked impudently up, munching something in his mouth, though eating in school was expressly forbidden.

"Ned, you can come this way," said Mr. Minot, in his usual quiet manner.

The boy arose, making contortions of countenance, treading on the boy's feet next to him—overturning his neighbor's slate, and setting the little boys into convulsions of laughter.

"Ned Boylston," said the teacher, "you were late this morning."

"I know it," replied Ned, pouting his lips and eyeing the master defiantly.

"Well, have you any excuse?"

"Ain't got one 'less I make up one," said Ned, impudently. "I can do that if you like."

"Speak respectfully, sir, or I shall thrash you," said Minot.

"Perhaps you couldn't," retorted the boy.

"Ned, what is the meaning of these actions?" queried Mr. Minot, willing to give the boy a chance to do better, for he was averse to using extreme measures if it could be helped; "will you answer me civilly, once for all, why were you late?"

"Because I wanted to be," replied the boy, half laughing.

"You will remain in at recess, and after school I shall punish you," said Mr. Minot, still keeping command of himself.

"Who cares for your punishment?" retorted the boy; "you'd better find out who your mother is!"

For a second there was dead silence. The teacher sprung to his feet, every movement expressing agony of the deepest, most intense description. His face grew white up to the roots of his hair, and great drops of anguish started to his brow, which was like marble. His book, which he had been holding, fell from his hands; his ashy lips twitched and quivered, as did his clenched hands. Then he came down swiftly from his desk, and with almost superhuman strength lifted the boy, holding him up at arm's length, opened the door of the room beyond, and sent him reeling to the extremest corner.

Everybody saw how his hands trembled and his whole frame shook as he locked the door; and the little tender-hearted children laid their hands on the forms before them and cried. Going back to his desk, he tried to command himself, but his eyes glared strangely, and not a vestige of color came back to his face.

For the rest of the morning, he went through with lessons and exercises deadly sick at heart; and several times the girls, who watched him furtively, predicted that he would faint; but to the end he kept his self-command, and dismissed his school as quietly and calmly as ever.

Then he sat down to his desk, and for a moment gave way to the emotion that, suppressed, would have killed him. A few long-drawn sobs, and he dashed the tears away, and sat thinking what to do.

"Some enemy has put the boy up to this," he said, between his shut teeth; "some fiend, who has no heart, no human feelings. God help me!"

It was Wednesday afternoon, and there was no school. Hour after hour the teacher sat there, bowed down with grief, utterly prostrated in mind and body. Once and once only had the daring boy within given any signs of life; that was soon after the dismissal of the school, when he threw himself violently against the door to test its strength, and then sullenly gave up.

Till almost dark the nearly heart-broken man sat there, crushed and mortified. What would be thought of this outrage? It would be upon the lips of every person in town.

"It bars my success in every thing," he murmured. "I thought here, in this quiet place, to evade the scorn and curiosity of the vulgar rabble; but even here fiends live, and I am disgraced. Curses on—no, no"—and he shuddered. "God forgive me; I can not do that."

Presently the shadows deepened in the school-room; the twilight was gathering, and the master started from his seat.

He felt no anxiety about the parents of this boy, as he was accustomed to have his own way, and follow his own inclinations. If he had been gone a week, instead of a day, they would hardly have expressed surprise. His father was a coarse, brutal fellow, who had hardly the natural instinct of the dumb creature toward his offspring, and his mother drank, constantly.

As poor Minot thought of these things, he rather pitied than blamed the boy; but at the same time a determination to find out, at all risks, who had instigated him to such cruelty, made his resolution half savage.

He armed himself with a stick five feet in length, which the boys had hung behind his chair one morning, out of sport, and, unlocking the door of the little closet, he went in. At first it was quite dark, and only the quick breathing of the lad could be heard; but by degrees he saw him, crouched in a heap on the floor, his forehead scowling, his face as ugly and determined as ever.

As soon as his eyes had become accustomed to the darkness, he went toward his apparatus-box, and took something therefrom.

CHAPTER IX.

THE BULLY SUBDUED.

TURNING to the boy, he exclaimed in a stern voice:
"Ned, say your prayers."

The boy never moved.

"I tell you to say your prayers," reiterated the master, in a louder voice.

"What for?" queried the boy, tremblingly.

"Because I don't know as you'll ever leave this place alive."

"You don't dare kill me," growled the boy, beginning to whimper.

"I dare any thing in the mood I am now," returned the master, making a noise as if with the lock of a pistol.

"Oh, Mr. Minot—don't murder me," cried the boy, now thoroughly frightened.

"Say your prayers, I tell you," shouted the master; "down on your knees."

"Oh! master—oh! Lord—I—I—I don't know any prayers," he almost shrieked, after an effort of memory.

"Very well, then you must go without them," said the teacher, quietly.

The boy shouted, frantic with fear. He caught his master by the knees and begged and implored for his life, sobbing wildly, his words almost lost in sobs.

"How did you dare insult me in that public manner?" asked the teacher, apparently softened a little.

"I—I—I—somebody told me to," cried the boy.

"Who told you, sir?"

"I—I—can't tell."

"Very well, you can have your choice. Tell me who told you—or take the consequences," and again that ominous click.

"Oh! Mr. Minot—I'll tell, I'll tell—but I shan't get my five dollars," sobbed the boy.

"Oh! you were bribed, were you? And who bribed you?"

"It—it was—it was Mr. Rafe Le Forest; now let me go home." There was utter silence for a few moments.

"I have concluded not to punish you with death," said Mr. Minot, in an altered voice, "but you have got to stay here all night alone, and to-morrow, in presence of the whole school, beg my pardon and tell them publicly that you were bribed to make the insulting remark you did by Mr. Rafe Le Forest, who offered you five dollars to follow his advice."

"I want to go home," blubbered the boy.

"You can't go home," said the master, sternly. "Once for all, I am determined to break up your insubordination. Your unruly habits have kept the school in confusion ever since I have been here, and it is time this thing came to an end. I have borne with you for a good while, because I pitied you, but hereafter either you or I must rule this school, and I promise you that I shall not give up *my* authority this year, so the sooner you learn to be obedient the better."

"I'm hungry," sobbed the boy, piteously.

The teacher reflected a moment, then remembered that he had two cakes and an apple, that he had taken from one of the children for misconduct.

"I will give you enough to keep you from starving," he said, and left the closet, returning with the food.

"I don't want it—I want to go home," shouted the boy.

Down came the long stick over his shoulders, and silenced him.

"If I do whip you, Ned, I'm not sure but I shall cut you all to pieces," said Minot, "so you had better not rouse me. In this closet you have got to stay to-night, at all events, and if you are not willing to follow my advice in the morning, I'll keep you there all day to-morrow and to-morrow night too."

There was no more contention. The boy, thoroughly subdued, inwardly muttering curses against Rafe Le Forest, crouched down against the wall, and the teacher, turning the key without compunction, placed it in his pocket, and set off for home. The next day everybody remarked how haggard and ill he looked—scarcely speaking except when necessary, never smiling upon successes that had been wont to receive his approbation, but moodily going through the first exercises

of the day. Then he went into the closet and returned with Ned. A more thoroughly shamed, crestfallen and confused face and manner it would be hard to find. Ned had slept upon the floor. His hair, which was rather long, hung uncouthly over his brows, and his eyes were bloodshot from violent crying.

"This young gentleman has something to tell the school," said the teacher, standing up and leaning against his desk.

"I—I'm sorry I spoke so," said Ned, sheepishly. "I ask your pardon," he added, with another hint. "It was Mr. Rafe Le Forest told me to insult Mr. Minot, and said he would give me five dollars if I would."

There was a dead silence in the school. Mr. Le Forest's admirers were ashamed of him, and the young girls looked deprecatingly at each other.

"Now you can go out to the pump and wash your face," said the teacher, scarcely able to repress a smile, troubled as he was, at Ned's queer appearance. The boy went out obediently, without making grimaces as was his wont, came in again and slunk to his seat, no longer possessed by the spirit of rebellion—utterly and forever conquered, while Minot went on with his duties as if nothing had happened. There was at times, however, a fierceness in his manner, a determination in his eye that assured those who were thoughtful that the end was not yet. And it was not.

The boys who had seen Rafe on that memorable morning on the hotel steps, did not fail to remind him of his cowardly action in more ways than one.

"What have you been doing, Rafe?" asked Rose, a day or two after. "All the girls are talking about it."

"Talking about what?" asked the young fellow, sullenly.

"Why, your hiring or bribing a boy to insult the teacher," replied Rose.

"Nonsense—there's nothing in it," said Rafe.

"Yes there is, for everybody's got it, even May's father, Mr. Rogerly. It's town's talk."

"Let it be town's talk—who cares?" queried Rafe, testily. "It's a lie, anyway," he added, a moment after.

"Why, Nell Avery told me; she heard every word of it—and said Mr. Minot turned white as a sheet."

"Did he?" cried Rafe, with a boisterous laugh. "How I should like to see *him* turn white—and cold too," he muttered.

"Yes, and she said all the girls pitied him, he seemed to suffer so. And he took the boy and pitched him head over heels way across the room."

"Capital—capital!" shouted Rafe, "quite a comedy. How graceful his highness must have looked tripping up the young rascal. I wonder the school didn't pitch into him."

"Well they didn't, but they'll pitch into you, I expect, for they all take the master's part. Rafe, I'd have done something a little more genteel, if I had wanted to distinguish myself."

"Oh, you hold your tongue; what do girls know about such matters?"

"I know that it has made you very unpopular," said Rose.

"And be hanged to it," muttered Rafe, lighting a cigar.

"But you've no idea what was done the next day."

"The prig threatened to shoot me, I suppose. Let him try it."

"No, he didn't threaten at all—but he made the boy confess before the whole school just what you had said, and the bribe you offered, besides asking his pardon."

Rafe stopped smoking for a moment—that, possibly, was mortifying; there were some girls there in whose good graces he wished to stand high.

"The old Harry!" he muttered, between his teeth. "Oh, well, that's only a part of the play—it will all come right."

"Did you hear of that affair at the school-house, May?" asked old Mr. Rogerly. May replied that she did.

"A most disgraceful thing for Rafe Le Forest to shoulder," continued the old man. "Upon my word, if Minot don't thrash him within an inch of his life, I don't think he has the spirit of a man."

"Why, brother—that is not like thee," said his sister, quietly.

"Yes it is, just like me. If the poor fellow has any private troubles of his own to carry along, I say a man who would drag them out and parade them before strangers ought to be made to suffer, and if the law can't touch him, a horse-whip can."

"What do you suppose *is* the trouble?" asked May, quietly.

"I don't know," said Mr. Rogerly, "and what is more, I don't know as I want to. The young man is working for himself, steadily and quietly. I like him. He don't smoke cigars, nor sport fast horses. You never see him lounging about the hotel or bowling alley. He dresses and acts like a gentleman, and intrudes himself and his opinions upon nobody. I, for one, shan't stand by and see him abused, so let Rafe Le Forest look out—if worse comes to worst, it will be worst for him. He's a nuisance—that's my mind, and if I thought he ever *dared* to come after my May as a lover—I—I don't know but I should be tempted to shoot him."

"There's no danger, father," said May, merrily, "Rafe don't even come here now, and Rose very seldom. She thinks I know about the cottage case, and is ashamed, perhaps."

"Ought to be, I should say," muttered her father. "I only wish the widow had called upon me in her strait. Her husband was a good fellow—I knew him very well. I'd have tried to help her like a Christian, if I don't profess to be one. As it is, I shall look into the matter, I promise you, and if Le Forest has taken advantage of the poor woman, why let him look out—somebody will take his salary in that case. And in the mean time she shall have as much as she can do, for those shades are going to be a novelty and will have a long run I don't doubt."

"That is just like thee, Joseph," said Miss Hannah, who had an unbounded admiration for her brother, "and I do hope if that Le Forest has been up to any such tricks he will be right smartly punished. It is time such things should be put an end to. I have heard some stories about him, that if they are true, and I believed in capital punishment—I should like to see him hung;" and having delivered this speech with more energy than was at all usual with her, she left the breakfast-table.

CHAPTER X.

THE HORSEWHIPPING.

"HULLO! what's the fuss here?" cried Paul Le Forest, as entering his home one evening he saw signs of a general commotion. Rose was weeping in the parlor, her mother walking the floor, sobbing hysterically.

"Oh! Paul, I've sent for the doctor, but I'm afraid he'll die," exclaimed his wife, pausing long enough for a tragic shriek at sight of her husband.

"Who'll die? what is it—what have you sent for the doctor for?"

"Rafe, father," said Rose, pausing in her sobbing. "He's up stairs—almost dead, and won't let any body in his room."

"Up stairs—almost dead—won't let any body in his room! Why what in the name of heaven do you mean?"

"He came home in a carriage, a hack from the livery stable—and he had to be helped out and up stairs, and he was as white as a sheet—and I'm sure he's fell or something—and he won't let one of us in. How do I know but what the poor boy is trying to kill himself?"

"Pshaw!" exclaimed Paul Le Forest, "he hasn't the courage to do any thing desperate. He's got in a fight I suppose—a drunken row or something. It would be just like him."

"Mr. Le Forest," cried the madam, savagely, "you're a brute. It's only lately that you've got into such ways of talking about your own children—your own flesh and blood."

"Because I am driven to desperation," he muttered.

"Well, if you *do* have trouble outside, I don't see why you should bring it into the bosom of your family—to your own sacred hearthstone," sobbed Mrs. Le Forest, attempting a touch of the pathetic, "but that's always the way with men—there ain't one of them fit to live—not one of them."

"Perhaps not," echoed Mr. Le Forest, in a hard voice; "pity they couldn't all be killed off, and the world given up to the dominion of those tender, gentle beings we call women. But I'm going up to Rafe's. I'll soon know what's the matter."

"Oh! stop, Paul—there, now there'll be trouble," cried Mrs. Le Forest, following him with frantic haste. "Paul, stop—let me go; you ain't his mother—"

"But I'm his father," resolutely said Paul Le Forest, and taking his wife with no weak grasp by the arm, he pushed her inside the door and locked it, putting the key in his pocket.

"There'll be murder done," raved the half-distracted woman, running from place to place, but finding no egress unless she jumped out of the window. "Your father acts lately as if he was crazy, and I ain't sure but what he is. This two weeks back he has absolutely frightened me out of my senses, what with his talking in his sleep, and his crossness to you children, which he never was before, never. And now here comes Rafe home, acting like a mad creature, too. The whole house seems upside down—actually, and I shall lose my senses, I know I shall."

"Perhaps we had better all go crazy together," said Rose.

"You needn't laugh, child; I have had trouble enough in my married life to set some folks crazy—but there, I'd scorn to disclose my husband's failings before his children."

"Well, I've seen enough of them lately," said Rose, with an undutiful pout. "Every once in a while the girls say, 'Why I thought you were going to give a great party,' and they torment my life almost out of me. I'm sure father said last fall that I should give the largest party of the season, and now see how he flies off if anybody speaks to him about it."

"Oh my, just hear that!" cried Mrs. Le Forest, in an agony of fear, as a heavy footfall came down over her head. "What are they doing up stairs?"

"I just think Rafe has been fighting," said Rose, listening. "He has made Mr. Minot an enemy—it was a mean thing to do."

"I wish that Minot had never come in this town," said Mrs. Le Forest, spitefully.

Rose quietly sighed. From the first her heart had been interested in the handsome schoolmaster, and though she nearly hated May, because her attractions had drawn him to her side, and disliked the course her brother had taken, yet she could not but confess to herself that whoever he might

be, it would have been happiness enough for her to be permitted to number herself among his friends.

Meantime Mr. Le Forest had gone to the head of the stairs, and for a moment stood there listening. There was not a sound that indicated life. He rapped at the door—still utter silence.

“Rafe!” he cried, in a loud voice. There was no answer.

Quietly taking a bunch of keys from his pocket, he began trying them one after the other, fitting them to the lock. At last, after some pains, the door flew open, and disclosed Rafe, who had only divested himself of his coat and vest. He was lying upon the bed, his face hidden upon his folded arms.

“What does this mean, sir?” asked his father, in a stern voice. There was no answer. “Are you hurt? What is the matter with you?”

“Nothing,” sullenly muttered the young man, not once moving his muffled face.

“Don’t tell me ‘nothing;’ that’s not the answer I want,” said Paul Le Forest, sternly. “Have you been fighting?” There was no answer. “Will you answer me?” and it was at this time that his foot came down upon the floor. Still Rafe would not speak, and his father, striding up to the bed, caught him by the shoulder and turned him hastily over. To his consternation, Rafe’s eyes were red and swollen, as if he had been crying.

“I wish you would let me alone,” he cried, fiercely, with a savage gesture. “I didn’t ask you to come here, and I don’t wish to be spoken to.”

“But what *is* the matter, boy?” urged his father in a softer voice. “What have you been doing? I tell you I *will* know about it.”

“Go out on the street and you’ll hear, I dare say,” said Rafe, in the same sullen voice.

“Have you been fighting?”

“No, I tell you.”

“Has—has that Minot any thing to do with it?”

“Curse him!” cried Rafe, savagely, starting up in bed. Paul’s lips grew pale and he bit them nervously.

“I’ll know about this matter,” he cried, hoarsely.

“I met him this noon,” said Rafe, in a broken voice, “on

the steps of the Adams House, and before I knew what he was about, or could move, he cornered me so that I couldn't help myself, and"—his hands clenched, and his face purpled—"struck me with a heavy rawhide, tied on to a stick. I'll have his heart's blood yet."

"It was never done for nothing," said his father, in a low voice. "Is—is that report true, that you sent somebody to the school, to taunt him about his mother?"

"Yes, and I'll do it again," muttered Rafe.

"No you won't," growled the eldest Le Forest, growing white, "no, no—you won't do it again. You were fool enough to try it once—he horsewhipped you, and I don't blame him."

"Father!" cried Rafe, savagely, fixing his glaring eyes upon him.

"I tell you I don't blame him. What do you know about him? What right had you to insult him in that public manner?"

Rafe's exclamation was an oath in reply. "You know, if I didn't," he said, coarsely, "for I never heard any thing from any body *but* you. I've heard you speak of it a hundred times." Paul's face grew still whiter and his brow more lowering.

"I tell you you were a fool!" he cried. "Not knowing the facts of the case, you have acted like a double-distilled fool; and I am glad you have had a beating for your pains."

Rafe, at this, almost foamed at the mouth with rage.

"So this is all I receive," he cried, hoarsely; "instead of a vindicator, I find my own father exulting and rejoicing over my defeat. If any one had treated you so, by Jove, I'd have killed him."

"And suppose any one had insulted your mother's name?"

"My mother has not injured her own fair fame," said Rafe.

At this the elder Le Forest started, bending upon his son a look of mingled doubt and inquiry.

"What are you talking about—what do you know of this Minot's mother?" he asked.

"Suppose I ask you the same question?" queried Rafe, defiantly.

"You had better be careful what you say about it to any

body," he said, in a smothered voice—"let me tell you, you had better be careful. It is none of *your* business, at all events."

"I'll make it my business," muttered Rafe, "to come up square with him—I'll be revenged if I die for it."

"You had better let the whole matter rest where it is," said his father, regaining his composure, for he had seemed violently agitated. "Lay by for a while, and as I am going to New York on business, I will find you a place. In time the whole affair will be forgotten and blow over. I have been planning for some months for you to go to the city. You have idled and driven about, now, long enough. It is time that your wild oats were sown, and that you learn some kind of business. You are nearly twenty-one, and I reproach myself that I have allowed so many opportunities to pass."

"Business be hanged!" muttered Rafe.

"Meantime your mother and sisters must be your company. From what I can hear of young Minot, he will have the sympathy of the whole community; it's no use for you to try and fight against it, or to endanger your own life by violence toward him."

"It's deuced strange," muttered Rafe, again; "I never heard you speak a good word for him before."

"Nor have I spoken a good word for him now," said Le Forest, in the same suppressed voice. "I have no love for the fellow, I assure you; on the contrary, I look upon him as a sneaking hypocrite, who endeavors to gain the good opinion of every one by his cunning and overreaching. He has contrived to make himself a general favorite, especially among the women; but his downfall will come, as sure as you or I live. It is true I know some things that might ruin him, were they to reach the public ear; but it is not the time to attempt it now. Keep dark, and I promise you you shall have your revenge; and those who now fawn upon him in spite of any thing that may be said to his disadvantage, will cast him off as if he had been a viper. What do you think of going to the city?"

"I'll go anywhere," said Rafe, sullenly; "but mind, I'm not to be deprived of pocket-money. A fellow can't live in the city as he can out here, and I've been used to a certain sort of style, so you must let me keep it up."

"You'll want a fast horse, I suppose?" said the father, sneeringly.

"No; but I shall probably go with those who own them," replied Rafe. "I shall not shame my breeding; you may depend upon that," he added.

"We'll talk about that some other time," said Mr. Le Forest.

"Rafe's been horsewhipped!" exclaimed Rose, crimsoning. "Oh! mother, I'll never show my face on the streets."

"What did Rafe let him do it for?" cried his mother. "Had he no spirit? Then he's none of mine; I disown him."

As before there was a general wonder—some applauding the young man; among the latter was May's father, old Rogerly.

"I don't approve of street fights," he said, one evening, as the young man sat talking with May, "but I'm glad the boy was punished. I hope you put it on him well."

Minot blushed.

"I regretted the matter as soon as it was over," he said, candidly, "and I should never have done it if he had made me a frank apology, or even shown some shame for what he had done; but his brazen defiance exasperated me, and I am only too glad that I did him so little harm. I expect he'd like to shoot me."

"Paugh! he's too great a coward," said Mr. Rogerly.

"It seems your father exonerates me," said Mr. Minot to the smiling May, as her father left the room.

"My principles are decidedly opposed to violent measures," said aunt Hannah, pulling her hand out of the blue stocking she was mending; "but I could not help thinking thee gave young Mr. Le Forest a lesson that he has needed ever since he has been out of frocks."

The young man seemed pleased that the Quaker approved of the act, and changed the subject by making some trifling remark to May.

CHAPTER XI.

THE THREAT OF THE MAD HUNTER.

"I WILL listen to thee, old Master, and I will still try to obey thee. Keep my hands from shedding blood ; but, oh Master, I have been sorely tempted."

This was the prayer of the mad hunter. His "lodge in the vast wilderness" was a little hut, composed of rough-hewn logs. A mat, made of the skin of some animal he had shot in his excursions, lay before his door ; his bed, a collection of skins, was tumbled together in one corner. A gun hung suspended upon some long nails driven into the wall, beside a rifle and a powder-horn. The only things that might remind one of civilization were the little sheet-iron stove that stood opposite the door, and a pile of old pamphlets, mostly almanacs, on a shelf. Outside there was a goodly show of wood, which he had cut down in his leisure hours.

The hunter arose from his knees. The sun was up ; its beams penetrated the little windows, boasting of one pane of glass apiece. The hunter proceeded to kindle his fire and make preparations for breakfast. This done, and his simple meal of dry bread and dried fish partaken of, he looked continually about him, as if even in that solitude he feared a witness.

It was now that his manner had a touch of that cunning which is peculiar to the insane. Hitherto his actions had been those of a person in the full possession of his reasoning faculties ; but now an uneasiness possessed him, and the glance of his eye was wild and suspicious. Going to the corner of the room, with a little stick he dug the dirt out of a knot-hole in the floor, until he uncovered, in this singular hiding-place, a small key, of which he possessed himself. Then, with many cautious looks and movements, he withdrew a little sliding piece of bark which had appeared a part of the log on which it was, disclosing a square hole cut in the timber of the wall ; from this hole he withdrew a box—

an ebony box, of costly workmanship—to which he fitted that silver key which he had taken from the knot-hole.

With the box in his hand, he crouched down upon the bed of skins, lifted the lid, and remained a long time lost in observation of its contents. Could we at this time have looked over his shoulder we should have seen a miniature-case containing a lovely picture—a group of three—of a young and beautiful woman, not more than twenty, but evidently the mother of two children, one of whom, an infant girl, nestled in her arms; the other, a boy of three, whose curly head nestled against her shoulder.

And could our thoughts have gone back with those of the wild old man who sat there, brooding over the past—gone back thirty years, over paths obscure and dark, we should have a point of light—a home of love and luxury, where the living faces of which these were the painted semblance, made gladness and glory, and where this forlorn hermit was then the center of the family circle, the fit and manly companion of those gentler types of beauty.

We should have seen the shadow fall. Thirty years before this morning, when the mad hunter sat looking at these pictures in his rude cabin, John Marston lived in the city of New York, as happy and proud a man as walked its streets. Successful in his profession, acknowledged a man of talent, with a rich and beautiful wife whom he loved to idolatry, and of whom he was excessively proud—with two charming children—earth and heaven for him were flooded with sunshine.

In an hour, without warning, the darkness fell. That wife of whom he was so proud, and the echo of whose lightest footstep rung long in his heart, eloped with another, a gay young man of society, unmarried, and known to be unprincipled. Himself too honorable to suspect others, engrossed in the duties of his profession, he had never suspected how vanity, fashion, flattery was undermining her young feet, until she sunk at once from his sight.

In her flight the love of the mother seemed still too powerful to put aside, for she took with her the baby girl who nevermore would thrill his ear with her silvery prattle nor gladden his eyes with the gleam of her golden ringlets floating over his breast.

From that cruel day upon which the darkness descended, Mr. Marston had never emerged into the sunshine of life. For a time he strove to obscure the sharpness of injured pride and betrayed love in the flames of the wine-cup; gradually his mind became unsettled; for several years he was the inmate of a lunatic asylum, from which he escaped, and since when his friends had ascertained nothing of his fate.

In these long and miserable years the ruined mind had recovered nearly its former clearness; but some thoughts, sights and memories there were which would throw it into confusion again. And in all this weary time, one purpose, sometimes very distinctly, at others more remotely, floated in his brain—vengeance!

The name of the man who had taken his wife from him was Le Forest. This fact may account for the other fact of the mad hunter having become known as haunting the vicinity for the last two years, or since the advent of the agent's family in the village.

That agent would have shuddered in his shoes had he seen the hunter rise up from looking at those portraits, carefully return them to their hiding-place, take down his gun from the wall, load it, and mutter to himself.

"He is coming through the woods up by Red Spring," he said, aloud, talking with himself, as was his usual custom when quite alone. "He will cross off at Stanville—take the pike-road, and come down to Red Spring. There I will meet him. Let me see; where is my ink-horn? Oh, here it is; this I will put in my belt, my old pen beside it—and then when I meet him, I will have justice. Only, old Master," and he piously raised his eyes, "let me not take thy vengeance out of thy hands. Restraine me, old Master, for in thy good time the vengeance will surely fall, and I would not have blood upon my hands. Does he know me?" he continued, as if asking himself the question; "yes, he knows me. He knew me the first time he met me, and he saw the hate my heart would not let my face conceal. Yes, Le Forest, the wronged man hates ye worse than he hates the cruel, painted panther, but he will not risk his eternal salvation by bathing his hands in your accursed blood."

It was true that Le Forest, who had the day before set

off on a journey on horseback, would take the route indicated by the words of the mad hunter. It was on business of importance for Mr. Rogerly, and he generally performed his journeys through that vicinity on horseback. It was early morning when he resumed his seat on the back of gray Bessy, his favorite mare, and turned her face toward the village he was to visit. Meditating fresh schemes as he was for his own advantage, he did not notice the extreme beauty of the morning. It was a winter scene. On every hand the white frost had left its glittering impress. The snow had melted, and a strong wind had blown the roads dry. When he came to the Red Spring, he let his horse stop to drink. It was a solitary place—not a habitation to be seen far and near—no signs of life apparent save in the little snow-birds who hopped from twig to twig.

"I wonder if that old fellow lives any where hereabouts," he said to himself, peering around. "If my suspicions are correct, I may expect hell from him," he muttered, savagely. "Hold! hallo! let go that bridle!" and while Le Forest made an effort to reach a pistol concealed in his breast, the mad hunter gave his horse an impetus with his foot. Bessy shied, and Le Forest caught at the bridle. In a moment the hunter's rifle was at his head.

"Dismount!" he cried, sternly.

"Who are you?" exclaimed the dismayed agent.

"One who has an account to settle with you," was the stern reply. "Dismount, I tell you, or I will shoot you. It wouldn't disturb my dreams at all to have your death on my conscience."

"Then you intend to kill me," said Le Forest, slowly leaving his horse, his face ashy pale.

"I have received a message from old Master," said the hunter, sternly, "and I shall obey him. Keep your hands off your side. Stop; I'll relieve you of your pistol if you have one. Don't move or I'll shoot you. I'd as lief do it as eat, and rather, but I must follow old Master's advice. When he says kill, I shall kill. I have had your life in my hands more than once, Paul Le Forest; your heart has been covered with my rifle three different times, and each time the voice of old Master sounded in my ear, saying 'don't,' and I forbore.

When I hear that voice say 'fire!' then I shall obey, and you are a dead man. Sit down there, you villain! I've something to say to you. How I should like to kill you!" and the man shuddered with hate from head to foot.

Le Forest sat down. It was a still, cold day, but he wiped the perspiration from his beaded forehead, again and again. He strove to rally, to address his formidable companion in some manner that should disarm his resentment, but he could not command himself, even to speak.

"Now, Paul Le Forest, I've something to settle with you for—not on my own account—that time hasn't come yet—but it will, when old Master wills it. There lives near you a poor widow with two children. Do you know them?"

"Yes, I know them," the man articulated, feebly.

"To their sorrow," returned the hunter. "Now, old Master has sent me for you," he cried, as if seized with a sudden frenzy. "He says you are not fit to live among men, and he tells me to kill you and throw you into Red river."

"My God!" exclaimed Le Forest, throwing himself upon his knees, "don't kill me—have mercy upon me," he cried, making pitiful gestures, for the mad hunter had presented his own pistol at his head.

"Don't pray to me," exclaimed the man, speaking in quick, piercing tones, "pray to old Master, for he says you must die. If you want, I'll give you time to pray, but you must be quick about it. Maybe he'll help you—I can't."

Believing that his last hour was come, the miserable man raised his eyes and hands to heaven, but feeling in his vile heart that he could expect no mercy there, he covered his eyes with his hands, and in a stifled voice, cried: "Oh Lord—have mercy on my poor wife—my poor children!"

"Your wife! your children!" cried the mad hunter in a greater fury than before, losing the strange calm that had characterized his movements, "where is my wife? Where are my poor children? Die! you viper."

He pulled the trigger—it snapped but missed fire.

"Old Master says wait a minute," said the mad hunter, his frenzy subsiding somewhat, "and while you're praying, just put in a few words for that poor widow and her two helpless children, whom you have ruined. Ask old Master to forgive

you for the vile deception you have practiced upon them—tell him that you are sorry, and that you are glad that your wicked practices are shortly to be put an end to by the man you dishonored. Pray!"

And strangely enough, in a trembling voice the man did pray, even for the widow and the children. There was fear, but no heart in that prayer.

"Ah! that does you good," sneered the mad hunter. "The near prospect of death makes a man wonderfully pious. Strange that it is so, since we can see death written on every thing, and know that it is surely coming. Let me see—is there any thing else you ought to pray for?"

"For God's sake, kill me at once," said Le Forest, who, sitting there with the murderous muzzle pointed constantly at his head, felt all the agony of a protracted death-struggle. Suddenly a change seemed to come over the mad hunter.

"Stop," he said, standing in a listening attitude, "old Master says that I am not to kill you this time, but that if I spare you, you must make restitution to the widow and her orphans. You said a moment ago you would be willing to do any thing for her or them—are you still of the same mind?"

"I'll do any thing—any thing you say, only spare my life," pleaded Le Forest, new hope springing up in his heart.

"Well, old Master has told me that you must execute and record a release of the mortgage you hold on her property.

"I'll do it," exclaimed Le Forest, the color coming back in his lips, "any thing," he muttered, "to get out of your crazy power."

"Well," said the mad hunter, "we shall see. I've got some ink in here, and a pen that old Master gave me himself—so you perceive every thing is as ready as it would be in a court of justice—where maybe we shall have you one of these days," he added.

Saying this he took from the crown of his hat, having first secured the gun and pistol, a sheet of paper, and a pen-full of ink from his vial, and seating himself upon a fallen log, he began to write out a release of the mortgage upon the widow's property.

"Here," he said, "sign this paper; I am the witness (and he read it aloud.) When are you coming back?"

"On Monday," said Le Forest.

"Don't lie to me," cried the hunter, laying his hand on the pistol.

"I promised Mr. Rogerly I would come back on Monday—and I always keep my word," said the agent.

"Oh, you do. Very well; then you must go, on Monday next, to the county clerk's office, and acknowledge this for record before him, as it is best not to have to call in two witnesses. And now, upon two conditions, old Master tells me I may spare your life this time. You know I can kill you, now I have found you out, go where you will. New York city is not large enough to secure your liberty if I resolve to make way with you. No place is dark enough to hide you from my vengeance. The first condition is this: I will kill you if you fail to meet me at L—ville on Monday at nine or twelve o'clock. The other condition is, that if you raise a talk or fuss about it, now or hereafter, I will assuredly blow your brains out. My old Master says I may, and nothing but death will save you from my vengeance."

Le Forest solemnly promised to comply with all the mad hunter said, and signed the papers with no little trepidation, even then, far from feeling assured that some sudden change might not attest the freakishness of his mind.

"There, I have signed it," he said, "and given my word."

"Your word!" sneered the mad hunter. "Well, now I will sign as witness."

He took the pen, wrote a few words, and held the paper before the shrinking eyes of his companion, who read, at a glance, a name which evidently had power to blanch his face—"JOHN MARSTON, the Mad Hunter."

Then, stepping aside, and appearing to listen attentively, he added: "There, go; old Master says, 'Vengeance is mine—leave that rascal for awhile.' But, mark you, man; you were not born to die a natural death! Now"—and he fired off the agent's pistol so close to his head that the wretched man sprung forward with an exclamation of fear. "Oh, don't be alarmed," he said, with his peculiar smile, sickly with hate; "your time hasn't come yet, as I told you before, so don't be frightened. There, take your pistol, get your horse, and be

off with you. And look here—be careful of that paper you put in your bosom the other day. It may have to be accounted for some time, you know."

Le Forest, if it was possible, grew paler than before. One gleam of hate shot from his eyes, as he gathered up his horse's bridle—one pressure of his white lips showed that in his heart also were the germs of a violent hatred, that would never be extinguished, now that his enemy had humbled him. Mounting with affected leisure, still narrowly eyeing the mad hunter, who watched every motion, he put spurs to his horse, or rather the whip, and was soon out of sight.

The mad hunter sprung forward, leaning on his rifle. Once he raised it to his shoulder, sighting the fast disappearing rider, as if he would draw upon him; then slowly lowering it, he took a long breath, and whispered between his shut teeth something about "old Master." Then, slowly dragging his steps, one after the other, he said to himself:

"Well! well! well! little Emily, you'll have good times now. Won't little Emily's blue eyes shine when she sees the paper—the paper that sets her free? She'll clap her hands, as she used to, when I came home, a long time ago. She won't know that I did it, because I'm her father. Oh, no; she wouldn't believe *that* if I swore it; and how could I swear it when I'm not at all certain myself? May be little Emily's dead, and this poor widow has stolen her blue eyes. I've got a ringing in my head this morning that troubles. I can't just think straight. Is it or isn't it little Emily that I'm going to give the paper to? Oh, no, it's the widow, over there by the fields. Well, I'll keep it safe, here, in the crown of my hat. Nobody'll ever find it there, because I've got a handsome red sash around my hat."

He stopped long enough to secure the release in the lining of his grotesquely-ornamented hat; then strode on, muttering to himself, and brandishing his gun in a manner calculated to excite alarm in any chance traveler.

CHAPTER XII.

THE ACCIDENT.

Not many days after the events of the last chapter, Le Forest had occasion to visit the city of New York on business for his employer. During his stay he was riding up Broadway in an omnibus. The vehicle was nearly full. Two or three fashionably-dressed girls took up nearly one side, and as Le Forest was still a handsome man, in spite of his portliness, he took every occasion to show his gallantry. The street was crowded with vehicles of every description. Confusion reigned. Men shouted to each other—the roar of rattling wheels made day hideous. The driver, looking out for passengers, suddenly checked the slow movement of his horses, and, loosening the check-string, let the door swing open. A woman was crossing, carefully, from the opposite walk, a bundle in her hand. As she essayed to mount the steps, she threw from a handsome but care-lined and sorrowful face her thick green vail. She had nearly reached the floor of the omnibus, when she looked up, met Le Forest's piercing eyes, caught her breath, gave one shriek, lost her balance, and fell upon the pavement, her bundle flying from her hands and rolling into the street.

Consternation, sudden and complete, ensued. The fashionable girls gave a succession of small cries. The driver of the cart following, whose horse's nose almost touched the door of the 'bus, drew rein and backed, to the disturbance of a pair of tall grays behind, who snuffed and snorted, and backed and pranced, till every vehicle on the street seemed struck with dismay, and trying to drive cart foremost. The policemen ran; the boys stopped on the corners; the cry went up—"A woman run over!" Soon a crowd gathered; the insensible form was picked up and carried into a store near by.

"Nobody's to blame," said the unsympathizing Jehu behind; "the critter's fainted."

Meanwhile they had laid the still senseless body upon the lounge, and summoned a physician.

"Better take her to some hospital or retreat," he said. "There are no serious injuries, no bones broken, only a few bruises. She's a decent-looking body; it was probably a sudden shock of vertigo, or something of the kind."

Yes, she was a decent-looking woman. Her age might be from forty-five to fifty. But for that settled look of grief she would have seemed much younger. Her dress was a dark delaine, very old but clean. A plain white muslin handkerchief was neatly folded about her throat—in every respect she seemed the decayed gentlewoman.

"Wonder if she's got any home?" queried some one.

At that moment the poor woman opened her eyes. A sigh that seemed to come from the very depths of her heart parted her lips. She looked wistfully round, lifted herself, and tried to walk, but the dreadful faintness seemed to come on again.

"Where do you live, my good woman?" asked a benevolent-looking individual.

"162 — street," said the woman, feebly; then, suddenly missing something, she cried, wildly: "Where is my bundle? It was work—it was not mine. Oh, I have lost it, and can never, never pay for it."

"A case of imposition," muttered an elderly man, who was rapidly noting down something in his memoranda.

"She looks too honest for that," said another. "I'll pay for a hack to take her home."

"Gentlemen, there is a carriage at the door," said some one on the outer circle of the crowd. The woman raised her head and looked wildly about her, shuddering as she did so, but the speaker was not to be seen. Some one led her to the hack, assisted her in, and the vehicle drove off. The man who had procured the hack was Paul Le Forest. He had stopped the omnibus almost as soon as the fainting woman was carried away, and now he stood looking after the hack as it drove through the crowded thoroughfare. Meantime the bewildered woman, now sobbing under her vail, was being rapidly whirled toward her home. A miserable place it was, in a miserable locality. Filth made the gutters noisome; and

all imaginable sounds of depravity from children, from the drunkards at the doors of low groggeries, from evil-faced women, filled the air. The house was large and of brick, having once been a tenement of respectability. Leaving the hack with difficulty, she entered the house, mounted to the fourth story, and tottered into her room, already occupied by a cleanly old Irish woman, who looked at her with undisguised pity, and the murmured words—"Such a leddy as she must have been to come to this!"

"An' how are ye now, ma'am?" asked the old woman, pausing from her work on the coarse shirts that filled her lap. "I told ye I thought ye was too wake to try and git out. Has it hurted ye much?"

"I'm very ill indeed, good Bridget; and, what is worse, I fainted in the street, and my bundle of work went—I don't know where."

"Oh! the Lord be merciful to us now, surely," cried the old woman, in real distress. "What's to be done? Thim men is ugly devils if any thing goes wrong. They'll swear ye sold the whole, and, maybe, put ye in prison."

"Don't say that, for the love of heaven, Bridget," cried the woman, in real anguish, dropping down almost helplessly; "don't say that. Oh! why did I get it to-day? Why am I so unfortunate? Nothing prospers in my hands. I bring ruin on all I go near. God be merciful!"

"A boy and a man is come here, ma'am, and the boy brought this," said a stout Hibernian at the door.

With a shriek of joy the woman sprung forward; it was the bundle of work.

"There, now, glory be to the saints," ejaculated old Mrs. Bridget, piously.

"An' the gentleman says as won't you be letting him come up to see ye's?"

The woman gave a terrified glance at her neighbor, hid her face in her hands for a brief moment, muttered, "Yes, perhaps I may find out," and said, aloud:

"Tell him to come up."

"It's I'll be putting mesilf out of the way, then," muttered old Bridget. "It's to see the sick woman down stairs, and to say her prayers for her," she replied, in apology, as her

neighbor told her to stay, and she hobbled out of the room.

Another moment, and Paul Le Forest stood in that humble place.

"Well, Terese?" he said, and glanced round significantly.

"You can sit down if you wish to," she added, mastering her emotion with difficulty.

"I do wish to—Terese—it is—it is twenty-six years since—since—where have you been all that time?" he asked, rapidly.

"Where have I been? Not here—in the midst of sorrow and desolation—wherever I have been—out in the cold;" and she shivered. "But," and she looked up again, her eyes fixed calmly on his, "I have led an *honest*, if an unhappy life, since that day."

His eye fell at her searching glance.

"Yes, for the one dreadful, dreadful crime, desertion of my family, I have suffered, God only knows what; but oh, thanks to that preserving Power, I have been able to be true to myself."

There was a long pause.

"Mr. Le Forest," she said, at last, "do you know where my children are?"

"How should I?" he queried, rapidly, turning pale.

"True enough; but oh, to feel the little clinging arms about my neck once more! I forget that they are not my poor little babies," she said, mournfully. "I tried to support my poor little Terese for four miserable years, and oh, how I struggled to keep her! Then I gave her to a good woman. Since I have come back from the West, where I have been living for years, I have tried to find that woman. I have learned that she is dead, and that her son married my Terese when she was sixteen; but the people have lost all trace of her. Whether she or her husband be dead or alive, how can I tell?"

"What was the name of this woman with whom you left your child?" asked Le Forest.

"Barclay," replied the woman.

"Ah!" he started, and changed color.

"What! you know—you have seen them?" she cried,

starting up, a wild light in her eye, a feverish red on her cheek. "Oh! Mr. Le Forest, you have done me a great wrong, but only lead me to my child, and may God forgive you as freely as I will."

"I—I don't know—Terese—pardon me for calling you thus," he said, a sudden respect in his tone.

"No, no; what have I to pardon? I have forfeited all right to be called by that more sacred name; only tell me. What does this hesitation mean?"

"Only that there is a Mrs. Barclay, a widow, living in the very town that I do. But it can not be her; she seems older. She has two children."

"But it may be, it may be," cried she, eagerly. "What is her first name? Have you any means of knowing?"

Le Forest colored, and drew out his leathern pocket-book; in his business transactions he had had occasion to note her name. From a paper he took therefrom, he read—"E. T."

"E. T., Emily Terese," cried the delighted woman, eagerly; "I have found my child! God be thanked!" and she lifted her streaming eyes to heaven.

"If it should be proved so," said Le Forest, "I am happy to tell you that I have just signed a paper which releases her from any further trouble on account of some property her husband left her."

"And have you done this, unconsciously, for *my* child?"

"It seems so, Terese," he said, his smooth voice faltering a little, as the memory of that terrible interview came back to him with sickening distinctness. "In her extremity I loaned her money enough to pay a small mortgage, taking her notes. She has not been able to redeem them, and I have concluded to cancel the whole obligation; so that to-day she is free by law from all debt, and her little property is saved."

"Generous man!" exclaimed the widow, tearfully; "then my child is comfortable."

"It is but little I can do to atone for my great sinfulness," he said, in a penitential tone, that proved the depths of his hypocrisy.

"I know not what to say to you, how to act," she said, after a moment of thought. "At times I have cursed you bitterly as the destroyer of my happiness; and then I have

seemed to hear a voice that said : 'Were not you as deeply to blame as he ? Had you not every blessing that would conduce to your happiness, and did you not willingly sacrifice them—willingly draw three loving hearts to disgrace and misery ?' Oh, I did—I could bow myself in the dust—I could *die* for very shame. But I solemnly believe the sin I dared all to commit—no, not the sin, for, God be praised, I was blameless there—but the suffering consequent upon it—the keenness of my anguish for years—the bodily as well as mental affliction I have borne, have been sanctified to my salvation. No; I do not dare to cast all the blame on you. You perhaps have married, and have a happy, a prosperous family ; but my lot has been wretched, lonely and unloved. I have accepted it, and learned to say, 'Thy will be done.' "

During this speech, Le Forest had sat, his head on his hand, his face concealed.

" You are poor," he said, looking around him.

" Yes, I am very poor, but my conscience is clear."

" Hang conscience !" thought Le Forest. " Why does the woman harp on that ?"

He took out his purse; her eyes flashed as he offered her some bank-bills.

" Paul Le Forest, what is that for ? You could not offer me a greater insult. Do you think I would take money from you ?"

" And why not ?" he asked, smiling, and looking upon her with something like admiration ; for in the dim light of that room, with her feverish cheeks and eyes, there shone something of her old beauty.

" Why not ? Do you ask me ? I would not take a cent from you to keep me from starvation. No, I have sworn that long ago. Put up your money, Paul Le Forest. Not a cent touches my palm that has not been worked for, and honestly won—no, nor never has. I have worked like a slave that I might not forfeit my new-won self-respect. Yes, in men's kitchens ; I, who never soiled my hands with toil before my marriage, labored like a bond slave, that I might be independent and honest. Don't offer me money if you would not obliterate what little feeling of returning charity I have for you."

It was evident that she spoke under a sense of the bitter wrong that in some way he had done her. He silently put back the money, and thrust the book in his pocket.

"I pitied you," he said, "and thought some little help would relieve you."

"No, I can work," she said, sharply; "work has become my nature, my life. All I ask of you is to give me the address of my child. I will write to her, and if she can forgive me enough to answer me, I shall be happy. I would have kept her, but it is better as it is—better, much better. For what help you have given my child, I thank you." She looked narrowly, suspiciously at him for a moment. "Why were you so kind to her?"

"Do you believe it impossible for me to do a good deed from honest motives?" he asked, apparently hurt at the suspicion her question implied.

"I want to, as heaven is my judge, I want to believe it," she said, "but I have found the world so harsh toward helpless women—I have found men so heartless, that I almost suspect everybody. But I thank you, you have done her a kindness. Believe it, I shall be grateful, and so will she."

"You have been ill," he said.

"Yes, very ill—I never thought I should get better—or else meeting with you would not have overcome me so. I should have brought pride to my aid."

"Are there doctor's bills to pay?" he asked.

"No—not one. I went to the hospital. You look shocked," she added. "Oh, I am used to poverty now. Once the thought of such a thing would have filled me with horror—but it is good that I have been humbled. It is all right. I have said all I wish to say."

She held the address in her hand. He felt that her last words meant a dismissal, and with more real respect in his heart than he had ever felt for any woman, he left her.

"A mighty nice gentleman he was, any way," said old Bridget, coming in soon after he had gone. "Was he a relation of ye's?"

"No, no relation," said the woman, kindly, "but he has brought me news of my daughter—my little child," her voice lingered lovingly along the words.

"Your daughter, is it?" exclaimed old Bridget. "Sure it's mesilf didn't drame ye had any childers in this country."

"Why, what did you take me for?" asked the woman, amused for a moment.

"Sure, an' I thought you be a leddy from the old country—brought to poor circumstances," was the reply.

"An Englishwoman, then, you took me for."

"Nothin' else, and a high-born leddy at that. There be something about you that be different from most folks—an' I've often said it."

To prevent further gossip of the talkative Irish woman, she hastily picked up the bundle of work, asking her to see if any of the garments were injured by their fall into the dirt of the street.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE MAD HUNTER'S GIFT.

"How beautiful they are!" cried May Rogerly, "oh! how very beautiful!"

She stood in the widow's little keeping-room. On the large table, drawn to the middle of the floor and covered with a snowy cloth, stood a dozen painted shades. In tinting and execution the artist had certainly shown great taste. The colors were well chosen and admirably contrasted.

"I hope your father will like them," said the widow, to whose face a renewed hope had given almost the freshness of girlhood.

"Like them! why he will be delighted, I know he will. I don't believe he began to imagine how pretty they would look. And by the way, here is some money. He said he could not exactly tell what he could pay till they were in the market. So there are ten dollars to begin with."

"Oh! that is too much," said Mrs. Barclay, hastily.

"No, he thought that would be a fair price, and that perhaps he could afford to pay you more. He said he knew he could if orders came in rapidly."

"How kind and good you are, both of you," said the widow, the tears brimming her eyes.

"And now I'm going to stay and spend the afternoon with you. Why! how much—I was thinking," she said, confusedly, "how much you look like somebody. You have got your widow's cap off."

"Yes, the little ones have been teasing me to take it off, and I thought it would please them. Do I look better?"

"Better! why you look ten years younger; not a bit older than I do."

"Oh! come, now, that is saying too much; but take off your bonnet and sit down—and tell me *who* I look like."

"Oh! somebody," said May, shyly.

"Ah! I can guess who somebody is; somebody has been making quite a stir in this little town, lately."

"Do you think he did wrong?" asked May, anxiously.

"Wrong, no; I think he did right. He would have been less than a man to allow any one to insult his mother."

"They say poor Rafe hasn't been out since," said May.

"I wish it had been the father instead of the son," said the widow, bitterly; "he deserves a horsewhipping. I can't help it," she added as if apologizing, "he has treated me so cruelly."

"Well, don't let's think of it this afternoon; let's be real happy," said May.

"Dear child, what have you had to make you unhappy?"

"Well, candidly, nothing," May replied. "I do believe the only trouble I have ever known was the want of a new dress or something of that kind."

The widow sighed as she said, "You lost your mother!"

"Yes, but then I was so young. I have never forgotten her though, for father has always talked about her, and seems to love her so dearly! The highest praise he can give me, is to say that I resemble her in looks or actions. Where is *your* mother?"

"My mother?" and a deep crimson flush overspread her face as the widow turned hastily away, "I—haven't seen her for years."

May did not remind her that her question was unanswered, it had seemed so to startle her.

"My mother," mused the widow, softly, "I remember her.

She was a beautiful woman, with a dark, dreamy eye. I recollect she wore so sad a look! Young as I was, I noticed it, and often would ask her about it, but it only made her cry. I know she was in some great trouble. When I was very young, she went away, and left me with my good mother Barclay, whose son I married. Often after that I asked her about my mother, but she never could seem to tell me. So you see I don't know to this day whether she is dead or alive. I wish I did—oh! how I should love her! I often think what a comfort it must be to have a mother sitting in the arm-chair by the fire—and how pleasant it would be to work for her, and have her to love and care for. Oh! what would I give if I knew about my mother. But there! I forgot that we were to cast all care to the winds and be happy," and she strove to laugh though her mirth was very faint.

It was succeeded, however, by a merry shout, loud and gay enough to disperse all the blues that had been gathering at thought of her troubles, and in rushed her children, their cheeks rosy red, their scarlet lips parted, exclaiming, both together, "We've been to the post-office, mother, and got a letter."

"A letter for me," she said, wonderingly, "post-marked New York. Why, who can it be from? New York," she murmured again. "I know nobody in New York—it may be some of my husband's relatives."

"Come, Helen, let's you and I go and play, while mamma reads her letter," said May, catching the children each by a hand, and running out doors with them—for it was a mild day.

Impressed with an undefinable fear, the widow opened her letter. The first word set her heart throbbing as it had not been stirred for many a day.

"MY DEAR DAUGHTER:—If it is indeed my child I am addressing," the letter went on. "I have lately seen a gentleman from the town of ——, who tells me that a widow by the name of Barclay, and whose initials are E. T., Emily Terese, lives there. I feel a strangely certain conviction that you are the dear child I am seeking, and equally impelled to tell you the eventful story of my life. When you have read it, it is possible that you will blush so deeply for the mother who carried you in her arms when you were a helpless babe,

that you will never wish to see her face. I dare not think what the consequences may be, but it is my duty to be candid and truthful, even if I injure my own cause.

“I was an orphan, left with a large fortune, and to the guardianship of an indulgent aunt. This aunt seemed only to care for my beauty, which she always spoke of in terms of the most extravagant praise, and concerned herself very little either about my education or my morals. The former she left with the principal of the school which I attended, the latter to every and any body. I thus grew up a silly, fashionable girl, with my head better filled than my heart, and it is the greatest wonder that with my unlimited means I did not plunge into folly with a freer step than I did. As it was, I soon became the leader in the most extravagant schemes of pleasure. At seventeen, I attracted the regards of a gentleman who was some ten years older than I was. He was not merely my admirer, but a sincere lover. But he would not flatter me, even by any extra attention, and his conduct so piqued me that I was led to think of him constantly, and to form a romantic affection for him. I have found out, too late, that his character inspired me with a true, womanly love, which I might have acknowledged if I had grown up under different circumstances. Month after month he followed me at a modest distance, never seeking me out. This at the same time pleased and piqued me—I tried to show my power over him as I did over other men—but the effort was useless; he would not be charmed, let the charmer charm ever so wisely. At last I was conquered in spite of myself, and promised him my hand. His means were not as ample as mine, but he was a lawyer in good standing, and with an excellent income. He was, besides, a very talented man, and commanded the admiration of all classes, and for a while I was perfectly happy. And now I approach that dark period of my life, the recital of which will burn into my very heart as I write, particularly while I remember that it is to a child I am writing. I was the mother of two beautiful children, a boy and a girl, yet I was still vain, thoughtless, and as fond of admiration as ever. Your father loved me too well—every thing I wished for was mine—my very anticipations seemed known beforehand. His greatest delight was to pet and please me. There

was no jealousy in his nature, or rather, I should say he loved me so entirely that he never dreamed or suspected that he had misplaced his trust. For some years a man of fortune, handsome and dashing, had been devoted to me. At first he hoped to be my husband, and I had once imagined that I loved him, and had flirted with him seriously. After my marriage my husband allowed me to go often to parties and balls unattended. But why go into these particulars? Vain, foolish, unprincipled as I was, it was a long time before I would listen to his artful pleading. He managed to make me dissatisfied with my noble husband. Weakly I yielded to his protestations, wickedly I left my husband's roof, taking you in my arms. We fled together in the midnight train which left the city for the west and south. In those days there was no telegraph to forestall the plans of guilty parties. Before my husband could realize my purpose, or settle on a plan for pursuit, we should be far away. I did not fear the interruption of our unblessed joy; but scarcely had the sharp whistle sounded and the cars moved out beneath the light of the stars, than repentance seized upon me. It may have been an impatient word spoken by my companion to the little child I held which suddenly opened my eyes to the abyss before me. I would have given life itself to be again within the holy sanctuary of home—but it was too late.

"That wretched, endless journey! for thirty-six hours we kept on our way. I was silent and trembling. At almost every stopping-place, where we tarried for a brief and hurried meal, I begged my companion to let me go—to let me wait for a return train—to leave me—only to leave me! He refused to listen to my prayer, but he was worried and irritated by my tears and unhappiness. At last we rested in a southern city. He left the child and me at a hotel, while he went to engage a more private boarding-place, in which we would be safer from observation, should any one be upon our track.

"Then it was I determined my course. I gathered up the jewels I had taken—I had quite a large sum of money in my purse. Without giving myself time to think, I hired a carriage, had it driven to the depot, where a train was about starting on its eastern way; and by the time that disappointed man returned to the hotel, I had escaped him.

" The agony of that ride back I can never tell you. I was innocent of actual crime ; but by this time my husband had learned of my desertion. I had it all to think of during that miserable journey ; and by the time we neared the city, I had determined that I never could face my husband again. I felt as if I was driving to my tomb. Oh ! I pity myself as I look back upon that time of darkness and trial. Finally I determined to seek the house of a woman who had been my domestic, but who was married and lived in a very poor way. I had done every thing for her, and she was very grateful to me. I knew I could depend upon her to keep my secret. I went there with my little child, yourself, and she received me with unmixed astonishment. In two days, before I had made up my mind what future course to pursue, the matter was blazoned far and wide in the papers. That decided me. Henceforth I should bury myself, if possible, in oblivion. Never could I face those I had once known again. As soon as possible I moved to the West. Occasionally I heard that my husband was heart-broken, and had plunged deeply into dissipation. The man who before had had such control over himself that he scarcely touched wine, drank now to inebriation. I had been the cause of all this desolation, and I despised myself. My son was adopted by my uncle—of him I have never since heard. One misfortune after another reduced me to complete poverty. Then I was obliged to part with you, when you were four years old—that was the bitterest drop in my cup of anguish. My nature seemed by this time thoroughly changed. I accepted every chastisement as due to my exaggerated wickedness. For years I lived in a sort of apathy, caring for nothing in life, and but for the restraining power of the Almighty, I should have killed myself. Many times have I been tempted to take my miserable existence, but something kept me from the sin. Strangely enough, for the past five years it has been the memory of your innocent face that has saved me. I have longed for you, dreamed of you night after night—and my toil has been lightened by just one thought of your childish smile. Surely I have been most sorely punished, and the marks of my suffering have made my face old and my hair gray. You would not look with any pleasure upon the wreck of one who has never fulfilled the

sacred duties committed to her trust. Yet thank God, with me, that though sorely tempted and suffering, I am as worthy of the name of mother as when I left your father's house, save only in the act of leaving—and that I have repented in dust and ashes for the insane step I then took. Remember what it has cost me—your love—my son's respect, if he be still living, (my uncle is doubtless long since dead,) a home, and a husband of whom I was not worthy. Oh ! my child, forgive me if you can—give me, if you are able, a place by your fireside. I will never ask from you more than friendship, I will never intrude myself upon your notice—I will work for you and your children, and they need never call me by the endearing name I have forfeited. I have been long ill, and hard work, and trials of no ordinary kind, have broken down a constitution never very strong. With ease and quiet, and freedom from the city task-master, slop-work, I am sure that I could regain at least a fair share of health, and my poor heart for the short time I live would be at rest. Answer me, if you think proper. If I do not soon hear from you, I shall accept an offer to go as a nurse with a family who will soon start for Cuba. I would not, if it could be otherwise, lay my bones in a foreign land.

“From your affectionate, though unworthy mother,

“TERESE MARSTON.”

The young widow read this missive through twice, then sat with clasped hands and tearful eyes, scarcely conscious, so rapidly did thought revolve in her mind. Could it be that a mother's hand had traced these lines, and that mother not the outcast she had dreaded to find, if ever she should make herself known ? Her heart beat with mingled emotions of pleasure and pain. The love she had repressed for years gushed out toward that unknown mother, and she longed to encircle the weary form with her arms, to point to the empty chair at the fireside—to say ‘sit down there, and in my household find a shelter for the rest of your life.’ But here came the thought of her poverty—soon she herself might be shelterless, compelled to seek narrow accommodations and scanty support.

“What can I do ?” she murmured again and again. “I will call in Miss May, and tell her all about it. She is wise for her years, and maybe we can settle it between us.”

So saying she tapped on the window-pane where May and the children were skipping rope—May as much a child as either of the others. She came in glowing and smiling.

"Not bad news, I hope," she said, as she met the anxious countenance.

Mrs. Barclay gave her the letter to read. Just as she had finished it, the children came running in.

"Oh! mother!" cried Helen, bounding forward, "the funny man is coming."

"And I'm afraid of him," echoed the more timid Mary.

"They have been telling the children strange stories about this poor hunter," said their mother, "at school. But I believe he is perfectly harmless, and would befriend all who will be friendly to him."

As she spoke she rose up, and responded to his knock. The door opened. He stood for a moment, staring at her, apparently forgetful of whatever mission he had come upon. At last, to her question whether he would come in, he started and shook his head, saying abruptly, as he thrust a paper in her hand, "Here, old Master sent you this," and turned away.

"What can it be?" murmured the widow, opening the package. "What! is it possible? Oh! Miss May—I can't believe it—look at this."

She thrust the paper with trembling fingers into May's hand. It was the release signed by Paul Le Forest.

"Why, my dear friend, the house is all yours again," cried May, joyfully.

"All mine—God has sent it—this release—how could this man get it?"

"The old hunter brought it, then?"

"Yes, he said that old Master had sent it to me."

"Mr. Le Forest has signed it, it seems."

"Yes—how in the world did that old hunter get him to sign it—and he such a hard man?"

"Heaven only knows. He probably has some power over him that we know nothing of. Now your mother can come," she added, joyfully.

"Yes, now my mother can come, and I shall have enough, with my earnings, to make us all comfortable. Oh! I am so thankful! so thankful!"

"That's strange about the name," said May, thoughtfully.

"What about it?"

"Have you not remarked? Here is this signed as witness, 'John Marston, the Mad Hunter.' He knows what people call him. But it's the same name as your mother's—Marston. Did you think of that?"

"Why, no; I was so excited by such a combination of surprises, as not to think of it. It is curious, however," she added, reflectively; "it is, of course, only a coincidence;" and the suspicion which had vaguely arisen in her mind faded away again.

May thought more seriously of it than Mrs. Barclay had done; but she said nothing further at that time.

"Now I am free to offer my mother a home," said the young widow. "I will answer her letter this evening."

CHAPTER XIV.

THE MAD HUNTER DISCLOSES THE AGENT'S FRAUD.

"It's very strange," said Mr. Rogerly, looking over his bills and papers. "I'm *very* sure I sent the lot marked 1921 to Stearns & Whitaker, and yet I can't find it on the book, nor the sign of a memorandum. That makes the third time I have had my suspicions," he muttered to himself; "now the matter must have a thorough overhauling." He called the book-keeper, explaining the matter to him.

"It *is* very strange sir," replied the young man. "I do believe we had the bills you speak of, and I even remember entering them. But they are certainly not in the book, and there is the book, just as I have kept it. I am willing any one should examine my accounts, sir. I have run them over again and again."

"There's a great leak somewhere," said Mr. Rogerly. "Are you sure that you have always kept your desk locked?"

"Why, there's no money in it, ever, sir," said the book-keeper, smiling.

"That may be; but accounts have been tampered with before now."

"But who could tamper with them here, sir?"

"That is not answering the question. I ask you if, to your recollection, you have ever left your desk unlocked?"

"I may have done so, sir, once or twice, but not lately."

"How long ago—do you remember?"

"Some three weeks ago. That morning I came in, and you were both here—Mr. Le Forest and yourself, I mean. You may perhaps recollect that we spoke of the old hunter who prowls around here at times?"

"Yes, well."

"I had left my desk open, and I thought all that day and the next that the figures looked strange. In particular I missed that very account. But I didn't once think that any one had got to the books."

"Was Le Forest here, when you came, that morning?"

"Yes, sir."

"How did he appear?"

"Well, sir, I can't say. He's never very social with me. I believe he acted in his usual manner."

"Is he often here when you come?"

"Not very often, sir."

"You have never seen any one else in or near the office?"

"No one but the old hunter, sir."

"What! he ever inside?"

"On that morning, sir. I have never told you; but just after you came in, while you were talking with Mr. Le Forest, I saw the old hunter just inside the door, sir, and such an expression I never beheld before on a human face. Why, it was perfectly furious."

"What was the occasion, pray?"

"Le Forest; he seems to hate that man, sir. And Le Forest turned round, saw him, and changed color. He appeared to be rather frightened, I thought."

"Who—Le Forest?"

"Yes, sir."

"The devil is always near when you are talking of him," muttered Mr. Rogerly. "There is the old hunter now."

In truth, the old man was coming straight to the door. It was a cold morning, and the venerable white beard swayed from side to side as the wind shook it. He had just completed that act of justice recorded in our last chapter, but he was not yet done with Le Forest. Rapping on the door, he opened it at Mr. Rogerly's bidding, and came in.

"Good-morning, my friend," said Mr. Rogerly, who always pitied the unfortunate.

"Good-morning," said the hunter, refusing the seat that was placed for him, and leaning against the wall. "Old Master has sent me with a message to you, and to you alone," he added, eyeing the young book-keeper.

"Spangler, go to your room," said the proprietor.

The young man left the two together.

"Do you know," queried the hunter, his face growing dark, "that you have an unmitigated villain in your employ?"

"To whom do you allude? Your words are capable of a very serious interpretation," said Mr. Rogerly.

"I bring a serious accusation, but a true one," said the old man. "Paul Le Forest is a treacherous friend and a bitter enemy—a snake in the grass; a midnight assassin, who would stab you, and laugh at your dying groans."

"This is very strange language," said Mr. Rogerly, seriously.

"I speak the truth—God's truth," replied the old hunter. "Few worse men exist than Paul Le Forest. Do you know that he tried to ruin yonder poor widow and her children?"

"I intended to find out the facts of that case," said Mr. Rogerly, "and shall do so the first occasion that offers."

"Ah! and he will make a show of being generous; he will tell you that, actuated by motives of the purest kind, he has given up all claims to the widow's property. It is false, sir! Here was the motive;" and he struck the gun he held with his right hand. "I forced him to resign his hold upon that widow's cottage and land."

"You?"

"Yes, I. I met him in a lonely place. Ask him if the Red Spring is deep, and you shall see him shiver and turn

pale. Old Master told me when I first met him, to kill him ; that he was not fit to live among men, and to let him lie in the cold bed of the Red River. But, after that, I was told to spare him for awhile," he said, more slowly, the frenzy fading out of his face. "It was but for a little while, however ; the man is in my power. Nothing but treachery and ruin has he worked all his life. My old Master will have no mercy on him ; no repentance will save that man now," added the old hunter.

" You astonish me, sir. Then you have known him for years ?"

" Yes ; I knew him when he was a prosperous merchant, and again when, after his failure, he became a money-broker. Then for many a long year I had lost sight of him, but within the last two years I have tracked him constantly. I am waiting the call of old Master, who has a work for me to do."

" Has this man ever injured you ?"

" Injured me ?" and the heavy rifle came down upon the office-floor with a thunderous sound. " I was bitten by a rattlesnake once, and the poison got into my brain. Yes, yes, it's the poison working ; it makes people mad, they say. Never mind about the old hunter, sir ; never mind. Let's talk about yourself. He has wronged you, and I want you to know it."

Mr. Rogerly became all attention.

" Last week, on Tuesday morning, he came to this place an hour earlier than either your clerk or yourself. Old Master whispered to me that some mischief was up, and I followed him. He came in. Presently I saw him—for I was behind that old chestnut-tree—go in that room where your clerk is now, open the desk, and take out a book, an account-book. Then I got closer to the window, and saw him carefully tear a page—as far as I could see, the last page that was written on, on both sides, fold it up, put it in his pocket-book, and place the pocket-book in his bosom."

" You saw all this !" exclaimed Mr. Rogerly, much excited.

" I saw it all, and have told you, as I intended to from the first."

"The villain has robbed me of thousands," he cried, rising up and walking the floor.

"What can you expect from the man who would rob the widow and the fatherless?" queried the hunter.

"Nothing—nothing but outrage," replied old Mr. Rogerly. "This matter shall be attended to immediately. You are ready to swear that you saw all this?"

"Ay! on old Master's own book," replied the hunter, readily. "And now I must go. I have done old Master's errand, and I must go."

"Stop, old man," said Mr. Rogerly, as he was leaving; "let me at least know to whom I am indebted for this kind interest in my affairs. Who are you? Your language and appearance lead me to think that you have not always been what you seem."

"It matters not to you who I am, or what I am," said the old man, with dignity. "Enough that I have performed my mission. When I have sufficiently exposed this villain, I shall retire to my former obscurity. Home or friends I have neither."

"You shall always find a friend in me, my good old man," said Mr. Rogerly; "and remember that my house is your home whenever you come this way; you will always find the latch-string on the outside."

For one brief moment the old hunter seemed affected; then straightening himself, he bowed his gray head, his lips moving, and in his heart, no doubt, thanking the kindly-spoken man.

"Your daughter gave me food when I was hungry, and not grudgingly, nor of that which others had left. I never forget such things, nor does old Master. Good-morning."

"Spangler," said Mr. Rogerly, "send John down to Le Forest's; let him say that I shall not be in the office to-day, but this evening I should like to see him at my house."

The book-keeper went out, and Mr. Rogerly mused upon what had filled him with such consternation and disquiet.

"I shall dismiss him at once," he said; "but who to put in his place? The very man!" he cried, slapping his knee, as a thought struck him. "I will do better by him than a salary such as he gets now; it will be nearly double; and

such a man as that I would willingly take into partnership. He shall come up this evening. I'll dismiss Le Forest immediately; I will not have the scoundrel round me. If he gives me any trouble to-night, I'll install young Minot; yes, instanter. I'll have no such dishonest hounds and heartless rascals in my employ."

It was Wednesday afternoon. Young Minot, who seldom indulged in pleasures of the kind, had invited May and her aunt to take a sleigh-ride. The air was bracing, the snow just hard enough to make a run behind sleigh-bells the most agreeable thing in the world. May prevailed upon her aunt to accompany her, but she made young Minot promise that he would not race, and would, as much as possible, avoid the very public roads.

Rafe Le Forest had scarcely been out since his public humiliation. As Minot guided his horse, a spirited animal, on the high road, there suddenly came in sight a neat little cutter, drawn by a tall gray horse. The two sleighs passed each other quick, but not until the occupants of Minot's sleigh had seen the features of Rafe Le Forest. He sat by the side of his sister, a fur cap drawn low down over his forehead, a thick scarf muffling his neck and chin; but in the glance of hate which he gave Minot, there was no mistaking the malice of the young man. The ride was a delightful one, with that exception, and that was not long remembered. On their return, however, they noticed the same sleigh just behind them.

"They must have turned, and going up some other road, followed us," said Minot. "They are nearing us. Shall we drive faster?"

"No; thee promised me not to race, Mr. Minot," said aunt Hannah.

"Very well; I'll keep my promise. Halloo, there!" he cried, angrily; for Rafe, in passing, managed to give Minot's spirited horse a sharp cut with the slender whip-cord he held.

With a plunge and a rear, forward Minot's horse dashed headlong, throwing the snow from his heels, and lifting the sleigh like a feather from the ground. Poor aunt Hannah sat paralyzed with horror. May, pale, and speechless too,

watched with terrible apprehension the vehicles that still filled the road, while Minot, white as the roadside upon which the drifts were heaped, stood up in the sleigh, and with admirable presence of mind guided the frightened animal so skillfully that the parties on the road, thinking it a race, clapped their hands as they passed them. They were almost home, when an old market-wagon turned the corner. Against this the light vehicle struck; the shafts were instantly broken, the horse flying down the street, May thrown out, and aunt Hannah screaming with all her might, sitting bolt upright in the fragment of the sleigh. There were no houses very near.

The old wagoner stopped, with many protestations that "he was sorry"—"never dreamed of doing no sich thing," and numberless other exclamations.

May, fortunately, had alighted on a drift, and though shocked by the suddenness of the fall, she was not much hurt.

Leaving aunt Hannah to scream till she recovered her senses, Minot hastened to May's rescue.

"My darling," he whispered, tenderly, "tell me—are you not hurt? How I shall reproach myself if you are."

"I believe not; I am sure not," said May, blushing and trembling, as he helped her to an upright position.

"God be thanked!" he murmured, fervently, trembling as much as she did. "That cowardly villain! this is the second time he has insulted me, besides endangering your life. His father shall pay every cent of the damages. But how are we to get home? It is still a good two miles."

"You are welcome to the wagon," said the old man, "if the ladies will go in sich a thing."

"I'd rather trust to my feet," said aunt Hannah, suspiciously eyeing the one-eyed, bony horse.

"Needn't be afraid of that critter," said the farmer. "She's as gentle as a kitten, and couldn't run if she wanted to," he added.

"I don't see but you'll have to avail yourself of the wagon, ladies," said Minot.

As for May, she was in such a delightful trepidation, it did not matter to her what way she went home, provided Minot

accompanied her. His precious words "my darling!" yet rung in her ear. Never before by word had he breathed his affection for her. The eye had told it, the timid deference, all unconsciously—but now she was blissfully assured, and blushed no longer with the fear that she had given her heart unasked.

Leaving May and her aunt at their own home, young Minot started after the horse, and learned that he was safe in his stable. May's father was terribly indignant when he heard the story.

"Those Le Forests wish to ruin me and mine," he said, "but they will have short shrift from me. Like their masters their time is short. Thank God! they have not robbed me of my baby yet," and he kissed May's blushing cheeks. "Minot, stay to tea;" he continued. "Give yourself no uneasiness about the sleigh—I will attend to that. Pearson, the livery keeper, is largely in my debt, so I can make it all right. Besides, I wish to see you this evening on business of importance."

It needed no extra urging to induce the young man to accept such an invitation. That evening Miss Hannah was in her glory. Getting up a tea was one of her specialties. No one could invest a common deal table with more poetry, not to say romance, than herself. There were pieces of silver and porcelain, kept for show on such occasions, that could tell stories dated a century back, when old ladies sat ceremoniously in high-backed chairs, and filled their tiny cups with the steaming beverage that always seems to do the heart of an old lady so much good. To-night the whole party was unwontedly merry—seeing no threatening cloud, no approaching storm—only blue sky and bright sunshine. Once only, across May's heart came the foreboding feeling caused by the old hunter's prediction, and that was at this very hour while her father's merry laugh sounded in her ear, and her own happiness made her almost afraid. She had never seen her grave father in such cheerful spirits—even her aunt's blue eyes sparkled unwontedly, and in her own heart had welled up a new happiness never dreamed of before. She not only loved but was beloved.

Tea was over and the cloth removed. Young Minot laugh-

ingly helped aunt Hannah back with the heavy table, and then sat down opposite May, who had just arranged the men for a game of chess. Mr. Rogerly grew thoughtful after he had ordered lamps to be carried into his study in the adjoining room, and walked the floor soberly, his hands folded behind him. Once he stood over May's chair, almost unconsciously stroking back the bands of her brown hair, and once he stooped over and kissed her. This was unusual with him. In all his habits he was undemonstrative. At half past eight the door-bell rung. He himself went nervously forward, checking May, and opened the front door. Paul Le Forest entered with assumed cheerfulness. As he saw young Minot in the position he had so long coveted for his only son, his brow grew dark for a moment, and Minot returned his salutation stiffly, and after that seemed constrained and unlike himself.

"Quite a cheerful family group, upon my word," he said, assuming an easy indifference, which perhaps he was far from feeling. "Our good aunt is always busy," he added, turning to where the maiden lady was knitting.

"No one ever need to be idle, Mr. Le Forest," replied the Quaker, stiffly. The rebuke, if intended to be such, was too pointed for him to relish, and he flourished his red silk handkerchief about his more crimson face.

"I heard you had quite a little accident," he continued, turning to Minot.

"It came near being a very serious one," was the curt reply.

"What was the cause? Was your horse unruly?"

"Oh no!—your son—*playfully*, I expect," retorted Minot, meaningly, "touched my horse with his whip, as he passed us, and the creature being spirited was frightened and run."

"Ah!" exclaimed Le Forest, "is that so? It was a very ungentlemanly thing, and I shall see that Rafe apologizes."

"I beg you will not, Mr. Le Forest," said Mr. Minot, "I can not accept an apology. I had rather the matter would stand where it is."

"Mr. Le Forest," broke in Mr. Rogerly, "will you walk in my library. I wish to see you upon business."

Paul Le Forest arose abruptly, looking like a guilty man.

"I hope papa will not make him his enemy," said May, watching their exit, anxiously.

"I had rather have that man an open enemy," said Mr. Minot, "for he will be an enemy at all events to all that is pure and good, and if I know where he stands, I know where to meet him."

CHAPTER XV.

AN ASSASSIN.

THE study was well lighted. Mr. Rogerly could never get too much light; it was essential to his happiness. On the table stood several account-books. Motioning his agent to a seat, the proprietor of the glass-works took from his study-table drawer several papers and bills. Then he seated himself in his own arm-chair.

"I have sent for you, Le Forest," he said, quietly, "to talk upon business matters."

"I am always ready, you know," said the agent.

"A disagreeable necessity forces me to speak very plainly."

"So much the better for both of us, Mr. Rogerly," said Le Forest, moving uneasily on his seat.

"Feeling that it is both unwise and unjust to harbor suspicion against an individual without proof, I have taken some pains to ascertain whether mine was well-founded. There is a large deficit in our accounts, Mr. Le Forest, which I shall call upon you to make up."

"Upon *me*, sir!" Mr. Le Forest turned as white as death.

"Upon you, sir. If you make honorable restitution, and leave me as you found me, the matter shall go no further; if you do not, you are not only discharged from your place, but published to the world as a scoundrel, a thief and a liar."

Mr. Rogerly's indignation had speedily carried him beyond the bounds which he had marked for himself. Le Forest grew furious. He sprung from his seat, his eyes flashing.

"No man," he cried between his shut teeth, "shall say such things to me and live."

"Which means that you would scruple but little to add murder to your many crimes," said Mr. Rogerly, sternly. "But I am not defenseless, as you will see," and opening a box near by, he displayed a revolver ready for use.

"Mr. Rogerly," said Paul Le Forest, cooling down, "to whom am I indebted for this treatment? Who is my accuser?"

"Ask your own conscience, Paul Le Forest. A man who could deliberately rob the poor and defenseless of their little all, must possess the heart of a fiend."

"You allude to the widow Barclay; I have given her back my bond—she is released, utterly released; I have even forgiven her what she fairly owed me, leaving every thing out of the question but conscience."

"Yes, but you did it at the very point and fear of death." Le Forest started.

"What do you mean, Mr. Rogerly?"

"What I say—that the threat of a madman, which he was ready at all hazards to carry into execution, forced you to do the justice you had neither the inclination or will to perform of yourself. But for that, your blood might have added a deeper crimson to the water of the Red River." Le Forest almost sprung from his seat.

"Perdition!" he muttered, between his shut teeth, "that devil has told him."

"And now, Le Forest, I wish to make quick work of this business. As I told you before, I am boldly cheated, before my eyes, of several thousand dollars, and that since the month came in. Doubtless other seasons have been fully as prolific to the man who has filched my money from me—but of that I have no proof. Restore the leaf which you tore from this ledger."

Paul Le Forest trembled as one in an ague-fit. His eyes grew wild with a deathly stare, his lips grew purple—his hand clenched as if it folded about some murderous weapon.

"How *dare* you accuse me of such a deed?" he exclaimed, keeping his voice even with difficulty.

"I do accuse you, and it will be better for you to confess, Le Forest," said Mr. Rogerly, calmly.

"Confess! never; I ask you for your proof!"

"You were seen to do it, Paul Le Forest."

"By whom?" queried the agent, hoarsely.

"I do not choose to tell at present."

"It is a lie!" shouted the guilty man.

"Take care, Paul Le Forest."

"I tell you it is a lie, and I throw it in the face of any man who dare accuse me."

"Then, as you assert your innocence, so you will be obliged to prove it in public. Paul Le Forest, I am utterly deceived in your character. I thought at the last, you would be more of a man than to deny even a foul deed, but I am mistaken. From to-night your connection with me ceases. I have already taken steps to appoint your successor, a man to whom, if he proves worthy, I shall give my daughter and bequeath my business. I am about to call him in."

Saying this, without bestowing a look on the crestfallen Le Forest, he stepped to the door and spoke to young Minot, who immediately entered the room.

"Have I been sufficiently insulted?" asked Le Forest in a rage, taking his hat up. "Before I go, let me say that I wish you joy of your new acquisition. I don't doubt he will display all those remarkable talents which he undeniably inherits from the *maternal* side of his family. His mother was a pattern of constancy and virtue," he sneered, mockingly.

Minot's eyes blazed.

"You infernal villain!" he exclaimed, in tones loud enough to be heard by May and her aunt. "Do you dare say this to my face? You! perjured, seducer, every thing that is false and wicked. Oh! great heaven! this is too much—too much to bear."

"Be calm, Minot," interposed old Mr. Rogerly, who began to have a clearer insight into the young man's meaning.

"Calm! how *can* I be calm?" asked Minot, sharply, as Mr. Rogerly placed his hand upon his shoulder, and felt the quick shudderings of his anguish. "How *can* I be calm before that execrable man?"

"God's justice has overtaken him," said Mr. Rogerly; "you, the man whom perhaps he has wronged, I to-night appoint in his place, my agent and prospective partner."

"I wish him joy," said Le Forest, glaring, "he needs some

position to make amends for the disgrace he will probably bear for the remainder of his lifetime."

Minot was rushing upon him; flesh and blood could not bear such cold-blooded insult. Mr. Rogerly held him back, while Le Forest, with a mocking smile, but a raging hate in his heart, left the house. For a long time the old man talked with his deeply-injured young friend, until Minot's voice grew low—he grew calmer, and went out to seat himself again opposite May, her partner in chess. But he could not play. His hand trembled when he made the moves, and a person of less discernment than May might have judged that his extreme agitation proceeded from deep-seated resentment.

It was Mr. Rogerly's habit to go to the factory every evening at half-past nine or thereabouts, to see that every thing was right, particularly as some of the men did overwork almost into midnight. To-night he went about the usual time—leaving the young people together, leaving his sister knitting. After he had gone, Hannah went to the door and looked after him.

"How dark it is!" she said. "I almost wish my brother had not gone out."

"Why, aunty, he always goes," said May. "Besides, it will be moonlight soon."

"I know it, but thee sees I am foolishly nervous to-night. All at once as brother left, I felt a strange presentiment, which thee would laugh at. But world's people do not have warnings as the Friends do. There was my mother's mother, Mary Renshaw, she could tell every thing that was coming to pass—deaths or marriages or misfortunes. Sometimes I think the gift has descended on myself."

"You'll make *me* nervous," said May, looking up smiling in her lover's face.

To her consternation his brow was dark as night—his thoughts appeared to be centered on some far-off subject. He did not notice her, but hastily rising, said:

"I believe I must go, Miss May. I am not well; I have a headache. Excuse my apparent incivility—all shall be explained to you to-morrow. Good-night." He took her hand with a quick pressure. His hand chilled her; it was like a piece of marble, clammy and cold.

May and her aunt drew up to the fire. May felt, for the first time in her life, fretful and cross—why she could not tell. It was no relief for her to sit there, looking at the fire. Perhaps her head ached—she guessed it did. At any rate she felt a slight dullness of brain and vision.

"If you're not afraid to wait till father comes," she said, "I'll go to bed."

"I'm not afraid in the least," said Miss Hannah; "the house is locked up."

"It feels dreadful lonesome," said poor May, yawning.

"Well, go along to bed and get to sleep, then, child," said her aunt; "your father will be along in less than an hour, and I'm wide awake."

So May went to her chamber. The moon was just coming up—softening the pensive slopes of the hills—laying a mantle of gossamer upon the filmed fields—showing the thinly scattered houses, and in particular the many points of Le Forest's stylish mansion. She stood at the window, looking out over the wide landscape. A dim apprehension of coming evil shrouded her finer perceptions—that subtle instinct that tells of the approach of danger. Strangely enough, it took the shape of a dread for and about young Minot. She had heard his harsh language, without knowing toward whom it was directed, and how could she tell but he had had some dispute with her father? It troubled her to think how moody and unlike himself he was—how different in his parting from his usual demeanor.

"What can the trouble be?" she murmured, again and again to herself; "there is assuredly something the matter with Mr. Minot and with my father. Heaven forbid that they should quarrel. He may have asked my father—" she blushed and paused. "No, that could not be before Mr. Le Forest. Oh! I have it—Le Forest took him to task for the whipping and then came high words—that must have been the matter—Le Forest lost his temper, and perhaps—so did Mr. Minot. I am so sorry if that was the case—but, heigho! I'll go to bed."

What time it was May knew not; it seemed to her that she had slept all night, when a grasp upon her arm and a loud voice wakened her. The moonlight was streaming in

and the rays of a small night-lamp, that stood outside the threshold of the door, served to illumine the ghostly figure that sat on the side of the bed. It was aunt Hannah, the folds of an old white shawl falling around her, her face pale, and a look of excessive terror in her large brown eyes.

"Child, does thee know what time it is?" cried her aunt through her chattering teeth.

"What time—why aunt—how should I? What is the matter?"

"Thee left me sitting in brother's arm-chair. Well, child, I sat till I heard the boy put coal in the furnace, and the fire was nearly out in the room. Then I must have fallen asleep. Hark! what was that?"

"Nothing, aunt—you are frightened. I heard no noise."

"Now that is strange, for three times this very night have I heard a noise like the going off of a pistol close to me. I know not whether I was awake or asleep."

"The house is locked, isn't it?" asked May, sitting up in bed, filled herself with the same undefinable fear she had felt before retiring.

"Yes, every thing as I left it—but May, where is thy father?"

"Abed and asleep," said May.

"But, child, would he have gone and left me up?"

"He might not have noticed you, aunt Hannah."

"Ah!" and she shook her head, "that is not like brother—he would most surely have awakened me."

"But—have you been to his room?"

"And knocked, but got no answer."

"Why didn't you go in?" queried May, uneasily.

"Go into my brother's bedroom," exclaimed aunt Hannah, much shocked.

"Why yes, if I felt any doubts as to his being there, of course I would," replied May, hastily dressing. "I will be ready in a moment."

The two women went through the passage, at the end of which, in the largest chamber in the house, old Mr. Rogerly slept. May knocked at the door, then called "father," several times. There was no answer. Timidly, tremblingly, she went in—then gave a loud cry—the bed had not been

touched. That pleasant face, with the gray hair that had for so many years pressed those pillows, where was it?

"Aunt Hannah, what time is it?" she asked, grasping her aunt's shoulder with both hands.

"I can't tell thee, child; the clock on the mantel-piece says a quarter of twelve, and it has stopped."

"Stopped! An eight-day clock! and father always winds it up with his own hands. Why aunt!"

"It is true, child, the clock has stopped, and for how long a time it has been so I can't tell."

"Oh! aunt Hannah! what shall we do?"

"Call Sam up."

They hurried to his room over the kitchen. The boy was a hard sleeper; it was some time before they could make him comprehend his own name. When the case was stated to him, he said that perhaps some extra work had come to the factory and he had stayed all night—or some accident had happened there.

"Oh! what *shall* I do?" cried May, wringing her hands, "he never did such a thing before."

"If you want, Miss May, I'll take a run down to the factory," he said.

"Oh! if you will?"

"Certainly I will," and the boy, now fully awake, dressed and came out on the landing.

"I won't need a lantern," he said, and forthwith started.

"We'll go down stairs," said May, "I couldn't rest up here." Nor did she down there, but walked the floor rapidly.

Meantime the boy hurried toward the factory, in some of whose windows the lights still burned. He had met with nothing on his way calculated to create any suspicion, but he was naturally rather a dull boy. Arrived at the place, a distance of three-quarters of a mile, just on the outskirts of the town, he rapped up the watchman, who came surlily to the door.

"Where is Mr. Rogerly?" he asked.

"How should I know?" responded the man with an oath.

"Why he has been here, hasn't he?"

"Yes, left here about half after eleven; had a good deal to say to the foreman. Why, what have you come after *him* for?"

"He hasn't been at home to-night."

"What! you don't say! why, it's half-past three;" and he turned round to the large clock that ticked slowly and heavily. "Well, that's mighty queer in a man of Mr. Rogerly's habits, who's always punctual to a minute."

"I don't know what to make of it."

"Nor I neither, I'm sure; perhaps the old man's taken with a fit. You'd better watch pretty closely both sides of the road as you go home. I wish the foreman was here, but he's two miles off."

"Well, I'll go back; but Miss May, poor little soul! I almost hate to see her."

Looking narrowly as he walked, feeling also nervous and apprehensive, the boy kept his eye on the road. Suddenly he espied something near the fence of a cornfield. Going toward it he saw that it was Mr. Rogerly's hat, and beside it lay his silk handkerchief. Picking them both up, he thrust the handkerchief into his hat, and then ran every step of the way home, impelled by what fear he knew not.

Arriving there, he threw his hat on the table, and then cowered and whimpered as he seated himself by the fire.

"Oh! where did you find this?" shrieked May, taking up the hat, turning as pale as a corpse. "And his handkerchief!" She drew it forth. "My God! it is covered with blood!" and reeling backward, with a ghastly light in her eyes, she sunk senseless to the floor, the spots of crimson on her hands making her an almost terrifying object.

The neighbors were called up, and immediately proceeded to search for the body of the supposed murdered man. It was found, at last, behind the brick which he had caused to be brought for some repairs that were to be put upon the factory, and brought home by sympathizing friends. May had not yet recovered from her swoon when the body was brought in, and it was well for the poor girl she had not.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE MURDERER UNMASKED.

IT was a frightful wound—through the back part of the neck, up through the jaw, the tongue being shot clear off. Young Minot, the teacher, was in custody, on complaint of Paul Le Forest; so that a double anguish tore the heart of poor little May. Her father was not dead; but though part of the time conscious, no conversation was allowed in his presence.

Young Minot, calm and perfectly self-possessed, awaited his trial with resignation. Rafe Le Forest was triumphant, never doubting his father's version of the affair. It seems that Le Forest had accused young Minot of quarreling with old Mr. Rogerly, because the latter refused him the hand of his daughter. Further, the pocket-book of the nearly murdered man was found upon the person of young Minot, who averred that he had picked it up that night, and could give no further account of himself than that he was walking about. The gun or pistol with which the deed was done, or supposed to be done, had not been found, and strict search was being made for it.

At last, when old Mr. Rogerly was considered out of immediate danger, the question was put to him—did he know who was his would-be assassin? His written reply was that he could not tell, for the person fired from behind him, and he knew nothing more. His clothes bore marks of having been dragged for some distance.

The whole town was in a tumult, which grew more violent as the trial drew near. There were dark hints and suspicions whispered here and there—hints that reached even May's ear, and made her cheek kindle with sudden hope. She had never once wavered in persisting that Minot was not the guilty man.

Paul Le Forest figured largely, with his usual blustering manner, declaring that he always knew that young fellow had the devil in him, and only wanted an opportunity to

show it—making out the case with much show and apparent interest in the wounded man.

One day, some two months after the outrage, May and her aunt went to visit young Minot. They found him in a small, comfortable room, engaged in drawing. His materials were scattered about him. He rose with a pleasant face, gave his hand to May, smilingly, and offered her and aunt Hannah the only chairs in the poor place, seating himself upon the bed.

"How is your father, Miss May?" was the first question.

"Better, they think, to-day," said May.

"How can thee endure this close confinement?" asked aunt Hannah.

"What can not a man endure who has a clear conscience?" asked the young man, smiling.

"Thee has too bright a face to do such a deed," said aunt Hannah, musingly.

"Who do you think has been here to-day?" asked young Minot, turning to May.

She shook her head.

"The mad hunter," replied the young man; "and his conversation took a strange turn. He asked me if I remembered my father, and if he looked like him. I didn't know but what he was going to make out a case of relationship."

"And did he?" asked May.

"Oh, no," replied Minot, smiling. "I told him all I remembered about my father, which was in fact very little, for my great-uncle took me in his family when I was quite young, only four or five."

"That was strange," said May, who was thinking, rapidly.

"What?" he exclaimed.

"Why, that he should ask you if you remembered your father. Do you know that I have thought once or twice that you resembled him?"

"That is flattery," said the young man.

"And there's another—" she hesitated, but encouraged by his look of inquiry, went on. "Why, Mrs. Barclay. I don't know how often she has—I mean *you* have, reminded me of her."

"Ah! I had a sister—I never knew what became of her."

She—she was taken away by her mother,” a burning blush overspread his face. May pitied him with her whole tender heart.

“ This man, hunter, madman, whoever he was, says that I shall be cleared.”

“ Of course you will,” said May, with enthusiasm. “ But my poor father! Think, he can never articulate again. The surgeon says so.”

“ Let us thank God that his valuable life is spared,” said young Minot. “ But he will declare it was not I who did the murderous deed.”

“ He has declared so already,” said May.

“ Is that so? Thank God!” he exclaimed, with much emotion. “ And does he suspect—”

“ He suspects Mr. Le Forest, and so do I,” exclaimed May, indignantly.

“ Oh! hush—thee must not talk so,” said aunt Hannah, nervously.

“ She is right,” exclaimed Mr. Minot. “ That man is a villain and has been for years—a robber, seducer and a liar. She is right—and God will yet unmask him.”

“ Has thee then no fear?” queried aunt Hannah.

“ None whatever—indeed, I am quite happy here—my thoughts are pleasant ones,” and he glanced at May. “ Besides, the old hunter says I need give myself no uneasiness, he shall clear me.”

“ If he does he will be a dear old hunter,” said May, laughingly.

“ May, how can thee laugh?” asked aunt Hannah, despondingly.

At that very hour Rose Le Forest and her mother sat in their little sewing-room, opposite the back garden, where they worked for the sake of saving litter, as Mrs. Le Forest called her sewing.

“ I thought I heard the hall door open,” said Rose.

“ Go and see,” returned her mother. The girl went out in the hall, and came back pale as death.

“ Oh! mother,” she cried, hoarsely, “ we shall all be killed.”

“ What do you mean?” and her mother rose in haste.

"That horrid mad hunter was in the hall. He pointed his pistol at me, and said if I cried out, or even spoke, he would shoot me. Oh! I shall faint away, I know I shall."

"What does he want?" whispered Mrs. Le Forest, aghast.

"Hush! he said if he heard a word above anybody's breath, he would kill us all. He asked where my father was."

"Oh! heavens, Rose!"

"Hush, I tell you—I have locked the door, but if he hears us, he will burst it in."

"Did you tell him where your father was?"

"Yes, I pointed to his chamber-door. He is asleep. He was up late last night, and laid down after dinner."

Leaving them to their nameless terror, let us follow the hunter in the agent's chamber. After he had let in two other men, he proceeded stealthily to the chamber of Le Forest, and opened the door. Then finding hiding-places for his witnesses, he stood over Le Forest, pistol in hand, and grasped him roughly by the shoulder. The sleeping man, as he opened his eyes, strove to spring up, but the strong hand of the hunter held him down. His position was a frightful one—awakened from deep sleep to encounter the burning gaze of an insane man, to feel one powerful hand pressing his chest, and to see the other grasping a pistol—no wonder the sweat started on his blanching face. Memory and conscience were at work, assisting in deepening the horror of his situation. His supplicating eyes met the fiery pair fixed unwinkingly upon him.

"Let me go," he feebly whispered, unable at that moment even to call out for help.

"I will let you go—to old Master. I heard him asking for you, loudly, last night. Ever since you attempted murder, he has been asking me why I didn't bring you."

"Murder! Who says I attempted murder? It was not me who did it! It was that schoolmaster. Didn't you know it was the schoolmaster?"

"Old Master says it was *you*—and I'd believe him before I would you. Oh, I know who it was that shot Mr. Rogerly! It was the man he had cherished, who crept behind him and shot him in the back. I've been all about the spot, and the bricks told me—the little stones told me, and the big stone in

the corner of the fence. A piece of paper told me, too. Don't deny it, Paul Le Forest. I have come here to make you confess it. Confess it this moment—free that young man whom you have falsely accused."

The eye of the unwelcome visitor burned with a light which made him shudder—he struggled faintly, but the deadly weapon held him in check.

"If it's confession you want, I'm ready to confess," he said, with that oily voice of his a little hoarse. "Of course I shot old Rogerly. Any man would say so, who was compelled to by a revolver. Such a confession wouldn't hold in the law—and the jury wouldn't take the word of a madman. Please let me go, good fellow. Let me up a little, please. I would like to go to my desk and get you some money."

A sarcastic smile glanced over the hunter's face. Otherwise he did not seem to hear the coaxing words.

"I don't understand how you took such good aim, so far off, and in the dark," he said.

"It was as light as day," rejoined Le Forest, quickly. "I saw him plainly enough, but he was a little too far off."

"You hear that—you hear what he says to the madman whose testimony isn't worth any thing?" The hunter, turning his head, appeared to be talking with spirits—the entrapped man did not suspect that two officers of the law overheard the damning assertion, which his tormentor, with such artifice, had drawn him into making.

At this instant, while the hunter's head was turned, he made a sudden and desperate effort to free himself, and get possession of the pistol, but the strong, thin hand clutched his throat, and the madman laughed a low, triumphant laugh.

"Don't stir, good friends, I'll not hurt him, I'll keep my promise. I only want to show him this bit of paper—it's the wad of that murderous shot you fired, and here's the piece it was torn from, and both pieces fit well this page of the account-book, which we obtained yesterday from your pocket-book. You remember I saw you tear it out that morning. I only want to know one thing before you go to old Master, to have all your accounts righted. Is Terese dead or alive?"

"I'll tell you all about her, if you'll let go of me, and swear not to use that pistol."

"Sit up then. I will not harm a hair of your head. Old Master is ready to attend to you. I'm willing to leave you to him. Is Terese dead?"

"No, she is alive and in this village. Mrs. Barclay is your daughter, and your wife is now at her house. I wonder Terese did not go back to you, Marston, for she ran away from me before the prize was secure for which I had run so much risk. She need not have dreaded to return to you, for she was as pure as when she left your roof. The first hour in which we rested after our flight, the bird turned and flew home again. I have never seen her but once since, and that was not a month ago. The schoolmaster is your son. I happened to know of it, and I was the means, secretly, of getting him appointed to the school. So you mustn't be so severe on me, my good sir. You see, I really have not done you so much harm as you imagined. Come, let me go out the door. I want to speak to my wife and daughter. I will come back."

The old man did not answer. His hands had sunk to his side; the pistol had dropped from his nerveless grasp. The revelation which Le Forest had made stupefied him for the moment. His whole soul was absorbed in the one idea of his Terese, stainless and repentant—that darkened, disordered soul, which had been groping toward the light for years, was yet able to seize upon this thought with speechless joy.

This was the moment of escape for Le Forest. He stepped from the bed to the door; but his hand had not touched the knob when two officials confronted him.

"I will not be taken alive," he muttered, as they drew forth the ignominious handcuffs—and stooping, quick as thought, he seized the pistol which still lay upon the floor, covered his heart and fired. The noise roused the mad hunter from his dream.

"What! is he gone? Old Master, I thank thee that I left vengeance in thy hand."

Rafe came home to find death in the house that day. To the shrieks and sobs of his mother and sister he added the most pitiful ravings of despair. It was a wretched household. For a time it seemed as if hopelessly blighted. The disgrace and desolation it had to endure was killing. But Rafe was

humbled and benefited by the trial. The good which was in him penury and misfortune brought out, and his mother and sister thereafter looked not in vain to him for protection and support.

When the roses of June were in their fullest bloom, there was a wedding at Mr. Rogerly's. Some of the brightness of life which illuminated the way of May and Mr. Minot lighted up even the shadows which care or sickness had left on others of the party. The pretty widow, with her little girls, was among the most charming of the guests. By her side was the bridegroom's mother, a pale, serene-looking woman, dressed in deep black. Mr. Rogerly suffered still from the effects of his wound ; but his strong constitution triumphed over it. Aunt Hannah was in her element, with the bride's cake and the wedding-dinner.

The day that Mr. Minot—now Marston—was taken into domestic partnership, he was also made a partner in the business of Mr. Rogerly, taking upon himself the active superintendence of the works.

One was missing from the animated group about the marriage-feast—the mad hunter. The exciting events of the last few months, and the reaction produced by the revelations of Le Forest, after years of such intense feeling, prostrated the old man upon a bed of sickness. His new-found wife and children watched over him with the tenderest solicitude ; but body and mind were too much shattered to ever recover their tone ; after a month of quiet, feebly sinking, he passed away, and now, “clothed and in his right mind,” sits, we believe, in the presence of the “old Master,” to whom, in his wandering way, he was a faithful servant.

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The author of "Seth Jones," "Bill Biddon," "Forest Spy," "Hunter's Cabin," "Oonomoo," etc., by these works at once established his reputation as the best delineator of Border and Indian life now writing for the press. He was introduced by the publishers of the DIME NOVELS' series to the public, and has contributed to their enterprise works which will be read as long as they are published. Among those already issued are :

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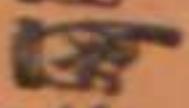
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